Men's Body-Related Practices and Meanings of Masculinity

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Psychological Research

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2007

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced according to APA convention.

Signature: _____ Date: 16 July 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Don Foster for his guidance and supervision as well as the fifteen men who agreed to be interviewed for this study.

ABSTRACT

The present investigation is about men and their bodies. Against the increasing visibility of the (idealised and eroticized) male body in Western popular culture as well as claims that men are becoming the new victims of 'the beauty myth', this study aims to examine men's appearance related practices in relation to meanings of masculinity. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen men between the ages of 18 and 38. Using that method of discursive analysis developed specifically for the investigation of masculinities by Wetherell & Edley (1999), various subject positions taken up by the men in talking about their appearance related practices were identified. The men positioned themselves as unconcerned with appearance, untraditionally masculine, heterosexual, well-balanced and disembodied. A concern for appearance appears inconsistent with ideals of hegemonic masculinity (as valued by these men), and it is suggested that men are unlikely to constitute a large proportion of those individuals who might be described as 'victims' of 'the beauty myth'.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The present investigation is about men and their bodies. During the past two decades the number of images of men permeating the media and Western popular culture has risen dramatically (Buchbinder, 2004; Edwards, 1997; Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2000). In addition to the increasing visibility of the male body, it is argued that a new representational practice has emerged in which the male body is depicted in an idealised and eroticised fashion; as young, toned and expensively groomed (Gill et al., 2000). Various studies tracking the changes occurring in representations of the male body over the past few decades have revealed that the cultural ideal of the male body has become increasingly muscular, with particular emphasis on well-defined pectoral and stomach muscles (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Hatoum & Belle, 2004; Labre, 2005; Leit, Pope & Gray, 2001). The exposure of men's bodies, coded as "to be looked at" (Gill et al., 2000, p.100), constitutes a disruption in traditional patterns of looking where "men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger, 1972, p. 47). Traditional male heterosexuality, in which the male body is "always active, sadistic and desiring", is now confronted with images of the male body as "passive, masochistic and desired" (Buchbinder, 2004, p. 222). The impact of the commodification of the male body is reflected in the recent growth of the men's grooming market (expected to reach the 191.7 million dollar mark by 2009) as well as the increase in the number of stores focusing on men's apparel (Alexander, 2005). At the same time models of masculinity emphasising an interest in appearance (the metro- and ubersexual[1]) have become trendy within popular culture as a result of the media's intense focus on celebrities who epitomise these notions (Gotting, 2003). Suggestions are that men are accomplishing a sense of self as much through style, clothing, body image and "the

[1] The 'metrosexual', recently granted the status of a 'real' word, is defined by MacMillan's English Dictionary (2006) as "a male with a strong interest in fashion, appearance and other lifestyle characteristics traditionally associated with women". Interestingly, not long after the rise of the metrosexual, 'trend spotters' announced the arrival of the 'ubersexual'. Described as being confident, masculine and stylish, these men are reported to "groom their minds as well as their hair" (SPC, 2005, p. 20).

right look" as women (Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2005; Kacen, 2000, p. 350), and it is against this background that the idea to investigate men's supposed increasing interest in their appearance was developed.

Research on Male Body Image

The mass media is a pervasive force in the shaping of ideals of appearance and attractiveness (Agliatta & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004), and the heightened visibility of the male body within popular culture together with the representational shift towards muscularity has lead to the perception that the pressure on men to obtain and maintain a particular body type is increasing. Traditionally research on body image has centred on women, but a preliminary review revealed a considerable and growing literature concerned with body image amongst men. Quantitative studies investigating male body satisfaction suggest that large proportions of men perceive a discrepancy between their ideal and current body size and shape (e.g. Hatoum & Belle, 2004; Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore, 1987; Vartanian, Giant & Passino, 2001). For example, Stanford & McCabe (2002), in their recent study designed to investigate gender differences in body image, found that 100 percent of women (n=60) and 90 percent of men (n=50) experienced a discrepancy between their ideal and actual bodies. Consistent with other research in which under- and average weight men have been found to want to put on weight, the authors found strong correlations between Body Mass Index (BMI)[2] and ideal body image ratings for both men and women. More specifically, as BMI increased the discrepancy between the individual's actual and ideal body decreased for males while it increased for females. Significant gender differences were also found regarding the ideal upper, middle and lower body, with the majority of men preferring an ideal upper body that was "substantially larger" than their actual upper body (Stanford & McCabe, 2002, p. 681). Other studies in which men have expressed dissatisfaction with their middle and upper bodies have found that these men are particularly unhappy with their abdomens, chests, shoulders and upper arms (Garner, 1997; Grogan, 1999; Moore, 1990)

[2] BMI is a ratio of weight to height, and is described as a reliable indicator of "body fatness". It is calculated by dividing one's weight in kilograms by one's height in metres squared (Centre for Disease Control, 2006).

suggesting that what men actually want is to be more muscular (Grieve, Newton, Kelley, Miller & Kerr, 2005; McCreary & Sasse, 2000). It is thus argued that the desire for muscularity is in fact the biggest concern in male body image (Drummond, 2005a; Grieve et al., 2005; McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Olivardia, 2001; Vartanian et al., 2001).

The media has long been implicated in the promotion of a thin ideal body shape for women, and has been shown to have a negative impact on women's body image (Agliatta & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Baird & Grieve, 2006; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006). A meta-analytic review of 25 studies examining the impact on women of exposure to idealised images of the female form revealed that body image was significantly more negative for women after viewing as compared to control groups (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). The internalisation of ideals as presented in the media is widely accepted as a causal factor in the development of eating disorders among women, and it is following this that calls for closer attention to the impact of the media on men's body image have been made. The concern is that adverse physical and psychological consequences may be associated with what is being termed men's 'drive for muscularity', and recent studies investigating the impact of exposure to media images of ideal male bodies on men's body satisfaction suggest that men respond to viewing images of muscular male models in much the same way as women have been found to respond to images of thin female models, experiencing a decrease in body (and specifically muscle) satisfaction and an increase in depression (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Baird & Grieve, 2006; Davis, Brewer & Weinstein, 1993; Hatoum & Belle, 2004; Labre, 2005; Lorenzen, Grieve & Thomas, 2004).

While some men have been found to limit their intake of carbohydrates and/or fat in attempting to achieve a leaner physique (e.g. Hatoum & Belle, 2004; Labre, 2005), men have generally been found to be less likely to diet and more likely to exercise in order to change their body shape and control their weight (DeSouza & Ciclitera, 2005; Fox, Page, Armstrong & Kirby, 1994; Moore, 1993; Tiggeman, 1994) and thus appear less at risk for developing severe eating disorders[3]. In attempting to achieve a lean

[3] Interestingly, a small body of work comparing homo- and heterosexual men in terms of body image suggests that homosexual men experience significantly more dissatisfaction with their appearance than

and muscular ideal however, men and adolescent boys have been found to engage in various potentially harmful behaviours such as the use of dietary supplements, anabolic steroids and other types of performance enhancing supplements, binge eating without purging and extensive weightlifting (e.g. Hatoum & Belle, 2004; Komoroski & Rickert, 1992; Labre, 2005; Maida & Armstrong, 2005; Moore, 1990). In addition, it is being widely suggested that exposure to images of muscular male bodies and the internalisation of this ideal is putting men at risk for a new form of Body Dysmorphic Disorder; "Muscle dysmorphia", previously referred to as "reverse anorexia", is characterised by a preoccupation with the idea that one's body is too small and ill defined, and individuals suffering from this disorder will go to extreme lengths to bulk up[4] (Olivardia, 2001). Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia & Phillips (1997) suggest that this disorder causes severe subjective distress, impaired occupational and social functioning as well as the abuse of steroids and other substances.

Within the literature just discussed body image has largely been conceptualised and investigated in terms of body shape and physique[5], however the men participating in a study by Hatoum & Belle (2004) suggested that it is important to examine other body features beyond weight and muscularity such as body hair, freckles and penis size. Boroughs, Cafri & Thomson (2005), in an investigation into male body depilation (i.e. the reduction or removal of body hair occurring below the neck), found that 64 percent (n=118) of men participating in the study engaged in the removal of body

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heterosexual men. These studies warn that gay men are at higher risk of eating disordered behaviour (e.g. Beren, Hayden, Wilfley & Grilo, 1996; Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko & Rodin, 1989).

[4] In a study of 28 amateur competitive body builders in the Western Cape, South Africa, 54 percent were found to meet the criteria for muscle dysmorphia (Hitzeroth, Wessels, Zungu-Dirwayi & Stein, 2001). While the motivation among body builders to develop a muscular body comes from participation within this particular subculture (Keane, 2005), it is suggested that muscle dysmorphia is highly prevalent amongst men in general (Pope et al., 1997).

[5] The inadequacy of experimental body image research for understanding women's distress around their bodies has been argued by many (feminist) researchers. In particular the concept of 'body image' as it is used in this work provides an over-simplified picture of embodied experience. See Blood (2005) for a comprehensive critique of experimental body image research amongst women.

hair. The authors suggest that this "new cultural phenomenon" has important implications for understanding changing ideals of physical attractiveness for men, but also because "it sanctions behaviours that were once reserved for women"[6] (Boroughs et al., 2005, p. 640). No studies investigating other aspects of male body image were found.

A Feminist Critique of Studies of Male Body Image

It is generally agreed that women experience more social pressure than men to conform to ideals of feminine appearance, however findings from studies such as those described above have lead some researchers to conclude that body image has become a problem for both men and women (e.g. Hallsworth, Wade & Tiggemann, 2005; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Stanford & McCabe, 2002). The upsurge in interest relating specifically to men's body image within psychology and to the body more generally within various other fields of social science can be attributed (at least in part) to changes in our contemporary cultural landscape and the rise of consumer culture in the late twentieth century (Davis, 1997). Having become a vehicle for self-expression, the body within consumer culture is positioned as central to the identity of the individual - it is through the fashioning of appearance that individuals present themselves to others (Davis, 1995; Featherstone, 1982; Finkelstein, 1991). However Featherstone (1982, p. 245) argues that, within consumer culture, "the subjugation of the body through body maintenance routines is presented... as a precondition for the attainment of an acceptable appearance and the release of the body's expressive capacity". Within this culture of consumption body maintenance provides a market for the sale of commodities, and it is women who have traditionally been targeted as consumers (Connell, 1995; Featherstone, 1982; Kacen, 2000). Bordo (1999), in her analysis of the increasing visibility of the male body, remarks that the increase in visibility of the male body points towards consumer culture's discovery and development of the thus far untapped resources of the male body.

[6] Interestingly this hypothesis is backed up by recent consumer trends; according to Datamonitor's latest report, *Evolution of Global Consumer Trends*, products previously on the fringe of the male cosmetics and toiletries sector (such as those relating to body hair removal) are moving into the mainstream (SPC, 2005).

While current enthusiasm about the body can be attributed to theorists' and researchers' desire to map cultural trends, the role of feminism in the emergence of the body as a topic for enquiry must also be acknowledged (Davis, 1997). According to Davis (1997), the body became a political issue as feminists involved the body in their analyses of power relations under patriarchy. Of relevance to this paper is the feminist analysis of the body's role in the construction of femininity and women's involvement in what has been termed the "feminine beauty system" [7] (MacCannell & MacCannell, 1987; Wolf, 1991). For some, beauty is the central feature contributing to women's domination, with definitions of femininity being defined by a patriarchal system that maintains control over women by defining them primarily in terms of their bodies (Hesse-Biber, 1996). For others, the ideology of beauty is less directly linked to social oppression but is one of a number of discourses centring on women's bodies which intersect and converge to construct femininity and entice women's bodies into aiding the reproduction of gender and sustaining the power imbalance (e.g. Bordo, 1990). Regardless of which particular perspective is taken, the processes of domination and subordination are central to feminist analyses of beauty, and beauty plays a role in the creation and maintenance of gender difference. It is on this basis that some feminists have expressed discomfort with the assumption that the gender gap in the realm of physical appearance is closing (Davis, 2003).

As evidenced by the tone of the research discussed above, men's increasing interest in their physical appearance is commonly being taken to indicate the development of "a unisexual beauty myth" (Askegaard, Gertsen & Langer, 2002, p. 796), in which "gender differences in bodily experience, body practices and cultural discourses on beauty and body alteration are converging in the direction of sexual equality" (Davis, 2003, p. 118). This discourse of equality has been described as part of a more general tendency in Western consumer society to erase differences based on class, gender or sexuality, promoting a homogenous ideal in which "individuals are presented as having the same desires, needs and opportunities for giving shape to their lives" (Davis, 2003, p. 119). With regards to physical appearance, Davis (2003) argues that

[7] This system, as defined by Davis (1996, p. 104), comprises of "the enormous complex of cultural beauty practices drawn upon by individual women in order to meet the contemporary requirements of feminine appearance".

when men and women are presented as having the same desire for physical attractiveness, the assumption is that they are equally subject to the pressures of cultural ideals of beauty. She argues that, while the presentation of men as the new victims of the beauty myth erases women's history of altering their bodies in efforts to meet cultural ideals of femininity, it also denies men's specific experiences with their bodies and the cultural meanings of masculinity in relation to such practices. As a next step in setting out the background for this study, it is important to consider a recent body of research investigating shifts in meanings of masculinity circulating within Western consumer culture, and specifically the development of models of masculinity incorporating an interest in physical appearance and engagement in consumer practices. It is to this literature that this chapter now turns.

Consumer masculinities

There is currently a wealth of literature concerning men and masculinities. Gill (2003) points out that, up until the mid 1980s, masculinities were studied only if they were considered problematic. Since this time however, masculinities in general have become an area of key interest and specifically the tracking of shifts and emerging trends in contemporary masculinities (Gill, 2003). Gill (2003) argues that central to accounts of modern forms of masculinity is the production of new masculine subjects; she gives the examples of the 'new father', 'black macho' and the 'modern romantic'. Of relevance to this project are two particular productions of the modern masculine subject, that is, the "new man" and the "new lad". These two constructions have attracted a fair amount of academic attention, specifically in Britain where these archetypes have been described as "the two most dominant and pervasive constructions of masculinity circulating in Britain over the past decade" (Gill, 2003, p. 36). Signified across a range of sites, Nixon (1996) asserts the need to examine the new man and the new lad as 'regimes of representation'. To this end his analysis of new man imagery reflects on key sites across which such imagery is to be found: television and press advertising, menswear shops and popular men's magazines. For Nixon (1996), men's magazines are of particular significance as it is within this medium that this new coding of masculinity has been most extensively elaborated. Indeed, men's lifestyle magazines have become a popular site for the investigation of

contemporary masculinities, and there is a recent body of research from the United Kingdom (UK) around new man and new lad imagery within this context[8].

Since the 1990s there has been a dramatic increase in the popularity of men's lifestyle magazines geared towards style conscious male consumers in the UK[9] (Osgerby, 2003). The increase in numbers of sales has been associated (in some cases) with the demise of the new man and the arrival of the new lad and "'laddish'" forms of masculinity (Edwards, 2006; Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks, 2001, p. 1). The new man and the new lad are frequently seen as "products of particular chronological moments", with the new lad having evolved from (and in response to) the new man of the 1980s (Gill, 2003, p. 37). The arrival of the new man is reported to have coincided with the launch of *Arena* in 1986, the first contemporary men's lifestyle magazine in the UK (Benwell, 2003; Nixon, 1996). Generally characterised as "sensitive, emotionally aware, respectful of women and egalitarian in outlook" (Gill, 2003, p.37) this 'new' man was also described as "an avid consumer and unashamed narcissist" (Benwell, 2003, p.6). According to Nixon (1996, p. 200) a central characteristic of the visual codes associated with new man imagery was "the signification of an assertive masculinity with the sanctioning of the display of sensuality" [10]. Thus, he argues, part of the cultural significance of new man imagery

[8] Edwards (2006) suggests that, despite having a history of producing men's magazines, America (along with other parts of Europe) has not developed a similar culture of new 'laddism'. According to Davis (2005, p. 1013) however, the British preoccupation with the 'lad' rivals the American obsession with the "'yuppie'" and the "'slacker'", terms (or archetypes) that are perhaps more familiar to a South African audience. With the exception of Barthel (1988) who identified a 'new' middle class man interested in the purchase of consumer goods, there has been surprisingly little attention given to men's magazines and contemporary models of masculinity amongst American academics (Davis, 2005).

[9] Incidentally the masculine consumer is not as recent a phenomenon as might be thought, and Osgerby (2003) traces configurations of the consuming male (anticipating the recent archetypes of the new man and the new lad) dating back to the 1930s.

[10] Another important characteristic feature of new man imagery is the location of masculinity within a specifically metropolitan context (Nixon, 1996). Gill (2003) comments on the persistent whiteness of representations of both the new man and the new lad, and Edwards (1997, p. 41) adds (of media images of masculinity more generally) that they are "always young ...particularly muscular, critically strong-

lay in it's loosening of the binary opposition between gay and straight-identified men; as Gill (2003, p.37) explains, the new man is "as likely to be gay as straight".

The new man has been regarded with suspicion by both the popular press and academics. In developing a genealogy of the new man and the new lad, Gill (2003) charts the demise of the new man in the press in the 1990s. She points out that, in addition to a scathing critique of his narcissism, the "'obituaries'" of the new man condemn him as "'inauthentic'"; as a media fabrication, marketing strategy or clever tactic used by men in order to 'get' women (Gill, 2003, p. 48). Findings by Jackson et al. (2001) indicate that such feeling for the new man is held amongst the general population too: men (and some women) participating in focus group discussions around men's magazines described the new man as contrived and as a media fiction[11] (this study is described in more detail shortly). While the flexibility in masculinity that the model of the new man encourages appears progressive in terms of gender relations, Rutherford (1988, p. 66) suggests that the new man, enacting "his new sensibilities" within a system in which he is privileged, indicates that changing meanings of masculinity do not necessarily constitute a threat to patriarchal relations. Instead he argues that they represent the *potential* for developing a sexual politics acknowledging the "contradictions, problems and desires of heterosexual men" (Rutherford, 1988, p. 67). It is in the absence of an attempt to address this potential for change that the new lad is believed to have been born. According to Nixon (1996), it was the lack of "scripts that were both sexy and anti-sexist" in relation to the new man archetype that left open the opportunity for well established scripts of heterosexual masculinity to re-emerge in the form of the new lad (Nixon, 1996, p. 206).

The new lad (and the accompanying culture of 'laddism'), commonly taken to represent a reaction *against* the new man and the feminist values he incorporated, is

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jawed, clean shaven (often all over), healthy, sporty, successful, virile and ultimately sexy". Media images can thus be seen to promote very specific models of masculinity.

[11] In contrast to this the new lad was characterized as a more 'natural' and 'authentic' model of masculinity (Jackson et al., 2001). Similarly constructions of the new lad in the press painted him as "refreshingly honest and free from artifice" (Gill, 2003, p. 49).

said to have developed with the launch of *Loaded* magazine in 1994 (Edwards, 2006). This particular magazine is reported to have rapidly outsold its competitors and generated a series of 'lad mags' including *Front*, *Maxim* and *FHM* (Edwards, 2006). In addition to being just as narcissistic as the new man, the new lad is described as hedonistic and "pre-eminently concerned with beer, football and 'shagging' women" (Gill, 2003, p. 37). As such, the new lad is largely understood to represent a defensive affirmation of masculinity through the return to the "traditional masculine values of sexism, exclusive male friendship and homophobia" (Benwell, 2003, p. 13). According to Benwell (2003), the new lad's response to the new man's anti-sexism has been the adoption of 'new sexism' discourse, involving the legitimation of male power by the strategic accommodation or negotiation of liberal or progressive discourses. Typical expressions of 'new sexism' include, among others, the synthesis of and vacillation between traditional and new models of masculinity, the expression of progressive discourse which is subsequently undermined and appeals to 'individuality' over gender politics (Benwell, 2003).

In contrast to readings of the new lad as a backlash against feminism and drawing on Ehrenreich's (1983) analysis of *Playboy* magazine, Jackson et al. (2001) suggest that the model of the new lad can be understood to offer men an alternative to (and escape from) the rigidities of the traditional male role as breadwinner within a conventional marriage and family structure. Gill (2003, p. 47) expands on this by suggesting that the new lad created "a space of fun, consumption and sexual freedom for men, unfettered by traditional adult male responsibilities". She goes on to suggest caution against subscribing too heavily to this view however, as it is rather too uncritical of the new lads' apparent misogyny. Chapman (1988), in her discussion of the new man, also criticises the application of Ehrenreich's (1983) analysis and the notion of 'rebellion' to so-called 'new' models of masculinity. Based on three examples in which the new man can be seen to reinforce male power (including the differential representation of male and female bodies in contemporary imagery), Chapman (1988) argues that the new man represents not so much a *change* as an *adaptation* in masculinity. Hers is a more cynical reading: "men change, but only in order to hold on to power, not to relinquish it" (Chapman, 1988, p. 235).

While both the new man and the new lad were constructed around consumerist practices, new lad culture became a far wider and longer lasting phenomenon to be found in prime time television and mainstream film as well as print media, as opposed to the new man who existed mainly in various forms of media journalism (Edwards, 1997; 2006). Edwards (2006) suggests that the success of new lad iconography lies in it's reconciliation of the tension between "the playboy and the narcissist" as well as its appeal to 'ordinary' men; the new lad successfully incorporated personal consumption and grooming into (young) working class masculinities (Benwell, 2003; Edwards, 2006, p. 42). Another factor contributing to the success of the new lad, according to Nixon (1996), was the decline in the display of masculine sensuality that accompanied visual codings of masculinity in 'laddish' magazines. Where the new man was sexually ambiguous, the new lad was "all too certain of his often downright adolescent sexual orientation" (Edwards, 2006, p. 42). Following this Nixon (1996) maintains that one of the more important lessons to be learned from the emergence of the new lad concerns the way in which this move highlights the difficulty of re-inventing heterosexual masculine scripts.

A more recent production of the modern masculine subject (briefly mentioned in the introduction to this paper) and perhaps a figure more commonly known in South Africa is that of the 'metrosexual'. The term was reportedly first coined by Mark Simpson in 1994 to describe "'the most promising consumer market of the decade'" (Simpson, 1996, p. 225), and popularised by Marian Salzman, director of strategic content at New York-based advertising agency J. Walter Thompson Worldwide. The metrosexual marks the return of unashamed narcissism (with a "passion for fashion", the metrosexual "plans errands around which shop windows offer the best reflection" (Ebenkamp, 2005, p.16)) as well as ambiguous sexuality: "'Metrosexual man might prefer women, he might prefer men, but when all's said and done nothing comes between him and his reflection'" (Simpson, 1996, p. 227). Indeed Edwards (2006, p.43) notes that "in discussing metrosexuality we are on remarkably similar territory to the New Man and... what unites them, and indeed the New Lad, is commodification". In a similar style to that of the new man, the demise of the metrosexual (and "contrived dandyism" (Barker, 2004, p.1)) coincided with the arrival of a new masculine subject: the 'ubersexual'. Ubersexuals, introduced by the

same Marian Salzman in her book *The Future of Men*, are men who embrace the positives of masculinity - "confidence, leadership, passion and compassion" (Wilson, 2005, p.1) – and have an unashamed (but unflaunted) feminine side too. Various celebrities said to conform to the ubersexual archetype include Pierce Brosnan, George Clooney, former US president Bill Clinton and Bono from U2.

Unlike the new man and new lad, the metro- and ubersexual have received little academic attention and, like the new man, seem to feature largely only at the level of media journalism. It is unclear how widespread these two characters are and how they are used (for example, are they common archetypes appearing in local contemporary men's magazines?). While there are some points of similarity between metro- and ubersexuals, the new man and the new lad I would argue that metro- and ubersexuals have not created a culture comparable to 'laddism' as found in the UK. An interesting focus for future research would be on the relationship between the constructs of the new man, lad, metro- and ubersexuals and the significance of metro- and ubersexuality for contemporary masculinities.

Changes in the men's magazine market are commonly taken to reflect (and drive) changes in contemporary masculinities and gender relations (Jackson et al., 2001). However Edwards (2006) points out that any analysis of men's lifestyle magazines in terms of masculinity is inherently an analysis of *representation* and that, as such, it is difficult to determine what impact they actually have on the men who read them. He suggests that their importance for understanding the experiences of 'real men' is thus limited, and other researchers agree that one cannot infer shifts in lived culture on the basis of analyses of representation (e.g. Gill, 2003; Nixon, 1996). While there are a number of studies investigating masculinity in men's magazines, only two studies investigating men's active engagement with men's lifestyle magazines were found.

As part of a larger research project investigating the social significance of the commercial success of men's lifestyle magazines, Jackson et al. (2001) conducted focus group discussions with 20 groups of men (although one consisted only of women and some were of mixed gender) in an effort to understand how participants made sense of changes in masculinity through their reactions to magazines. The

researchers identified a range of discursive repertoires[12] (or discourses) used by respondents in their attempts to make sense of men's magazines. According to Jackson et al. (2001) a discourse of 'surface and depth' was used by many participants in talking about men's magazines; participants characterised such magazines as superficial, lacking in depth and highly disposable ("rubbish" and "crap"). Several groups, drawing on a discourse of 'honesty', are reported to have distinguished *Loaded* as being more "honest" than other magazines. In contrast to other magazines characterised as pretentious (such as those trading on the image of the new man), *Loaded* was perceived to offer "'a celebration of the unacceptable face of men'" (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 116). Related to this was the use of a discourse of 'naturalness'; the new lad was described as a more natural form of masculinity in comparison to the contrived image of the new man. Another discourse drawn upon was one of 'openness', particularly with regards to sexuality. According to Jackson et al. (2001) the fashion pages were sometimes deemed to provide readers with a publicly acceptable way of looking at images of attractive men without the stigma attached to viewing more explicitly homo-erotic images. Some men are reported to have felt that men are "opening up", and that it is now more acceptable to be different. While participants constructed men's magazines as 'harmless fun' in some cases, others spoke of them in terms of the social 'change' thought to underlie their success. For example some men saw such magazines as a response to feminism or as a reaction against political correctness. A discourse of 'seriousness' was positioned as one to be avoided, and those who took these magazines too seriously were dismissed as "sad, single and lonely" (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 126). Lastly a discourse of 'women as other' was employed in differentiating men's from women's magazines, and also applied to the manner in which women were represented in men's magazines.

[12] Discursive repertoires are defined by the authors as "public forms of talk that enable individuals and social groups to make the magazines meaningful" (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 112). The concept of discursive (or interpretive) repertoires shall be discussed further in chapter 3 of this report.

In their analysis the authors distinguish between discursive repertoires and the discursive dispositions[13] adopted by participants towards these repertoires. This distinction emphasises the ambivalence and ambiguity involved in men's readings of men's magazines. The range of positions adopted by the men towards the repertoires included ones of 'celebration', 'compliance' and 'hostility' as well as 'apologetic', 'deferential' and 'defensive' approaches. Others involved a 'vulnerable', 'distanced' or 'rejecting' position and an 'analytical', 'dismissive' or 'ironic' stance. Taken together the discursive repertoires and dispositions identified indicate the range of ways in which men (and women) make sense of men's magazines and the images of masculinity contained therein (Jackson et al., 2001). Gill et al.'s (2000) study, as described below, reveals the similarly complex manner in which men respond to images of idealised male bodies contained within men's magazines.

Gill et al. (2000) examined 140 men's responses to representations of the idealised and eroticised male body and found that few men responded to them in an uncomplicated manner. In fact the authors identified eight types of response, and note that these were not mutually exclusive; the men often had a combination of these responses. While the vast majority of men felt that such images were designed to be aspirational, Gill et al. (2000) found that few actually aspired to the looks depicted in the images shown to them. Those men who did aspire to such a look were most likely to be in their mid-twenties and to have come from metropolitan environments. Importantly, 'aspirational' men were also those who felt that such a look was achievable. Gill et al. (2000) report that the most common way in which the men responded was to describe the pressure that they felt such images placed upon them to look a certain way. In contrast to the 'aspirational' men, these men felt that their attempts to modify their bodies were not freely made choices. Some men expressed a mixture of anger and resentment towards the images shown to them, based on their self-felt inability to ever achieve a similar physique. While a small number of men expressed the belief that a concern with appearance indicates shallowness, a commonly held opinion was that such representations, and the models in them, were

[13] Discursive dispositions are described by the authors as "more personal" than discursive repertoires "and open the possibility of less ordered and more ambiguous meanings" (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 112). They involve the position(s) that one personally takes in relation to widely shared repertoires.

narcissistic. Gill et al. (2000) note that this position was linked to a discomfort with male concern around appearance as opposed to the more moral line of rejection taken by those describing such concern as shallow. Some men criticised the uniformity of the images and commented on the promotion of a very narrow definition male attractiveness, and one-third of the men are reported to have denied that such images hold any significance for them. These men either felt insulated by being involved in a long-term relationship, or that women aren't interested in what men's bodies look like and thus there was little reason for them to worry very much about their bodies. Lastly some men admitted to finding such images attractive; heterosexual-identified men did this mostly through an exaggerated denial of the models' appeal.

The study by Jackson et al. (2001) highlights the variety of reading positions assumed by men in relation to men's magazines, while the study by Gill et al. (2000) reveals the complex nature of men's reactions and responses to idealised images of the male body. Gill et al. (2000, p. 116) conclude that the variability of men's subjectivities needs to be further explored in order for men to be addressed as "complex, embodied and relational beings". The current project has an interest in investigating the impact of models of consumer masculinity focusing on the appearance of the male body on the lives and embodied experiences of 'real' men. Following the critique by Davis (2003) of the presentation of men as the new victims of the beauty myth, it is noted that this project requires an approach to studying men's individual body and appearance related practices in relation to meanings of masculinity. In the next section of this chapter, those studies investigating men's bodies in relation to meanings of masculinity are presented.

Investigating Men's Bodies and Meanings of Masculinity

Perhaps one area in which the appearance of the body is most obviously linked in the popular mind to cultural ideas about masculinity is that of bodybuilding, and some research on the construction of masculinity in this sport has been done (e.g. Klein, 1993). Indeed, Wiegers (2003) describes bodybuilding as that material practice by which normative masculinity is inscribed on the male body; muscles have been described as "*the* distinctive symbol of masculinity" (Wiegers, 2003, p. 153). Based

on interviews with 17 non-competitive bodybuilders, Wiegers (2003) concludes that engagement in the subculture of bodybuilding enables the achievement of a hyper-masculine identity; bodybuilding is an assertion of male dominance as power, physical and emotional self-control, mastery and skill. What is perhaps most interesting, however, and what Wiegers (2003) pays little attention to, is that amongst the 81 percent of men who reported that bodybuilding enhanced their sense of masculinity was one man who reported his feelings of masculinity to be contextual. While he experienced an enhanced sense of masculinity in terms of his ability to train and increase his strength, he reported that this did not carry over into all other areas of his life.

In contrast to Wieger's (2003) interpretation of the meaning of muscles in bodybuilding subculture, are the meanings attached to a muscular build by homosexual men participating in a study by Drummond (2005b). These men highlighted the importance of appearance in gay culture, with particular regard to muscle definition. Muscularity was not only equated with physical strength, but emotional strength and strength of character as well, which was, in turn, equated with control and a sense of resilience. In addition, musculature was reported to play a large role in the hierarchy of men within gay culture, conferring status on their bearer by enhancing his ability to "pick up" other men (Drummond, 2005b, p. 279). Drummond (2005b) suggests that what is different in the meaning of muscles for homosexual men is the lack of association with what he calls 'heterosexual masculine domination'.

For the men participating in this same study the concept of masculinity was closely related to the male body, not just in terms of aesthetics but performance as well. Interviewees reported being continuously aware of how they are perceived by others, and often used their bodies to project "a certain masculine presence" in order to "blend in" to the heterosexual world while constructing another in the company of other homosexual men (Drummond, 2005b, p.277). Based on a number of data sets, Drummond (2005c) concludes that the body is a central point around which homosexual men develop and exist, with much of the focus on the body's looks and its ability to perform a dual role in what he describes as two separate lives.

While the more extreme forms of body modification (e.g. bodybuilding and plastic surgery) attract a fair amount of attention both within the popular mind and academic research, Frith & Gleeson (2004) argue that the more mundane strategies of self-presentation should not be overlooked in attempting to examine the impact of changing cultural trends on men's behaviour. In their investigation into men's clothing practices, Frith & Gleeson (2004) discovered that the 75 men in their sample strategically used clothing to manipulate their appearance and approximate more closely cultural ideals of masculine appearance (that is, to appear slimmer, taller, bigger and/or more muscular). Despite many men reporting that they were not very concerned with their appearance, these assertions were, according to the authors, undermined by their careful attention to their clothed appearance. Frith & Gleeson (2004) suggest that the men's reluctance to admit an interest in fashion was an attempt to distance themselves from public perceptions of men concerned with appearance as effeminate. Many of the participants felt that men should not be interested in their appearance, and the authors suggest that, because an interest in appearance is associated with gay culture, men might feel the need to express not just their masculinity but also their heterosexuality against women and men described as effeminate. In contrast to some of the body image literature previously discussed, findings from this study based on interviews with men highlight the fluid, contradictory and contextual nature of body image: men's experience of their body image shifted between "fat days" and "thin days", and different aspects of the body were reported as salient at different times and in different places (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). While this study highlights the varied and flexible nature of men's embodied experience and practice, the authors argue that, in view of the increasing objectification and commercialization of the male body, future research should explore the ways in which men negotiate the demands on them to be both mindful and unconcerned about their appearance. Gill, Henwood & McLean's (2005) investigation into the way in which men speak about their bodies and bodily practices does just this and also reveals more of the complexity of men's relationships to the surface of their bodies.

Drawing on semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with 140 men between the ages of 15 and 35, Gill et al. (2005) note being struck by the limited

range of ways in which men talked about their bodies. Men were asked to talk about their appearance related practices as well as their feelings around body modification. One of the most pervasive themes occurring in the men's talk was that of individualism and the value attached to "being different". The men used various means to position themselves as "different" to other men, including critiques of uniformity and conformity, assertions of autonomy in relation to all their bodily choices, and characterisations of other men as "'sheep-like'" or "'clones'" (Gill et al., 2005, p.47). The theme of libertarianism (elicited most commonly in response to questions about cosmetic surgery) was one in which the men stressed bodily autonomy and the individual's right to choose. Here Gill et al. (2005, p.49) note being struck by the construction of the self as entirely "socially dislocated": the men exhibited no sense of self as part of a collective, and there was no recognition of the social context in which people wanting cosmetic surgery feel pressure to look a certain way. Few men challenged societal definitions of attractiveness and, where pressure to look a certain way was acknowledged, Gill et al. (2005) note that it was constructed in exclusively individual terms. Interestingly, the remaining ways in which men constructed the meaning of attempts to modify the body functioned to set limits around the bodily autonomy so strongly asserted within the discourses of individualism and libertarianism (Gill et al., 2005).

The 'rejection of vanity' was one theme in which the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate concern for appearance were negotiated. Vanity was positioned as something to be condemned, and the men guarded themselves against accusations of vanity by employing disclaimers about their appearance related practices. For example, the men consistently justified their use of skin-care products in terms of their function rather than their effect on appearance. The 'rejection of vanity' was noted to be most evident in talk around cosmetic surgery; the limits to the discourse of bodily autonomy appeared to fall at that point at which an individual's desire for cosmetic surgery might be interpreted as vain. Vanity was felt to constitute illegitimate grounds for surgery.

Some men subscribed to the notion of a 'well balanced self', which was one in which obsession was condemned and things weren't to be taken too seriously. While this

theme was not as widespread as the others, Gill et al. (2005) note that it played a significant role in the self-definition of those men in whose interviews it was expressed.

The final theme involved condemnation of not caring enough, and being seen to have "let oneself go" attracted great disapproval. This last included the notion of 'self-respect' to negotiate the boundaries between appropriate levels of care and attention and the risk of vanity and obsession. This discourse requires the individual to take responsibility for their appearance and is highly moralistic: here the body is read as an indicator of self-control and self-discipline, and the appearance of the body is read as an indicator of lifestyle and identity choices (Gill et al., 2005).

Gill et al.'s (2005) findings contribute to an understanding of how men's bodies are addressed by social norms of gender. The authors conclude that men's bodies are not only charged with expressing a certain identity, but that they are also implicated in the production of normative masculinity. In talking about body modification practices, the men actively engaged in constructing and policing appropriate masculine behaviour in relation to the body: "scathing censure" was reported to greet those deemed to have transgressed these norms thus implicating the body in the "profound and intimate regulation" of normative masculinity (Gill et al., 2005, p. 58- 59).

These studies provide clear evidence for the argument that any investigation into men's body and appearance related practices is incomplete without accounting for these practices in relation to masculinity. In addition, they suggest the highly contextual and variable nature of body image, masculinity and the meanings attached to men's body related practices. What is left unclear, however, is what the concept of masculinity actually refers to, and what it means in the everyday lives and to the material practices of men. Drummond (2005b) in fact comments that he is often met with participants' blank stares in response to the question, "what does masculinity mean to you?" Researchers often draw upon the concept of 'normative masculinity' which, when not defined, includes what can be described as cultural stereotypes of 'manly' behaviour. It is the nature of the stereotype, however, not to represent individual experience, and thus it is here that one starts to question the relationship

between individual lives and cultural ideals. Hearn (1996) criticises the use of the concept of masculinity on a number of points, namely that: the concept is imprecisely used in many cases and that it has a wide variety of uses – he argues that meanings of masculinity stretch from notions of an essential quality, gender identity, sex stereotypes, attitudes and institutional practices. Before going on to investigate the relationship between men, masculinity and physical appearance then, it is important to be clear about what is meant by the concept. In the next chapter I present a theory of gender that acknowledges the diversity of men's experiences and allows one to account for the influence of social change on men and masculinity.

2 THEORISING MASCULINITY

Areas of critical enquiry such as feminism have drawn attention to the limited understanding afforded by the tendency to universalise experience within the field of social theory (Petersen, 2003), and over the past two decades a focus on men as specifically gendered individuals has resulted in a large body of work relating to men and masculinity.

Based on the feminist analysis of gender as a structure of social (and power) relations and postmodernism's focus on the role of language in the construction of social life, the rapidly growing body of research focusing on men and gender has approached the concept of masculinity as a social construction (Connell, 2000; Coltrane, 1994; Hearn & Morgan, 1990). Favouring an understanding of language as constructive and not merely reflective of an external reality, the theory of social constructionism maintains that language and communication (or discourse[1]) are cultural *practices* within which various realities are constituted (Durrheim, 1997). Proponents of social constructionism are concerned with the social actions performed by discourse, and with how people create versions of the world within the course of their interactions (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). Within this framework, identity (and ones' identity as a gendered individual) is conceptualised as a discursive construction, which is to say that people create and express their identity through their ongoing verbal and non-verbal communication with others (Parker, 1997; Petersen, 2003; Segal, 1990). In terms of gender identity then, an individuals' identity as a man or a woman is actively produced using culturally available discursive strategies. Masculinity (or gender) is an accomplishment: something that has to be achieved and sustained by the individual through continuous "'presentation management'" (Coleman, 1990, p. 186; Dull & West, 1991). Identity, as an accomplishment, is thus never fixed but fluid, able to be adapted to particular social settings and contexts (Edley, 2001). With regards to masculinity, research has demonstrated the historical variability of the meanings and

[1] The term "discourse" is used to refer to the various ways in which meaning is conveyed through culture, and includes both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication (Parker, 1997).

norms of masculinity belonging to any one culture, as well as the diversity of meanings that exist in any one current setting (Connell, 2000; Kimmel & Messner, 1995; Petersen, 2003). Within the literature it has thus become popular to speak of "masculinities", and to approach the concept of masculinity as contextual, fluid, and variable (Connell, 2000; Johnson, 1997).

A Feminist Concern Regarding the Investigation of Masculinities

In their commitment to problematising the concept of gender, feminist social psychologists have long been engaged with issues relating to masculinity and have raised concern regarding men's involvement in this field (Coltrane, 1994; Johnson, 1997; Macleod, under review). Macleod (under review) has critiqued the concept of 'masculinities' in terms of its dangers for feminism, expressing concern for the potential of masculinity theory to subvert the theoretical concept of patriarchy[2] in understanding gender relations. With the concept of masculinities forming the dominant basis for understanding men's activities, the worry is that men may be absolved of their role in the oppression of women (Johnson, 1997; Macleod, under review). A response to these fears comes from Connell (1995, p. 37), who says that:

> "To recognise diversity in masculinity is not enough. We must also recognise the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: the relations of alliance, dominance and subordination".

Locating his work within the study of gender *relations*, in which masculinity is always "masculinity-in-relation", Connell (1995, p. 44) has taken a pro-feminist stance in the development of his sociology of masculinities and is attentive to the problematic of gender power (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985). Another criticism levelled at some social constructionist accounts of gender has been their tendency to disembody the gendered individual. Connell (1995) points out that when gender is conceptualised as a performance, as a subject position within discourse, bodies become merely objects of symbolic practice and power and never participants; bodies

[2] The concept of patriarchy refers to the social structure of contemporary Western society's gender order, specifically the subordination of women and the dominance of men (Connell, 1995).

are the blank slates upon which culture is inscribed. While by no means the strongest part of his theorising, Connell (2005) argues for the agency of the body in social practice and for an irreducible bodily dimension to experience and practice. In acknowledging the role of the body in the construction of masculinity, Connell (2005) further aligns himself with current feminist analyses. It is to his sociology of gender that this paper now turns.

Connell's Sociology of Gender

Connell's (1987; 1995; 2000; 2005) interest lies in the nature of the social processes organising men's lives (Wetherell & Edley, 1998). In accounting for these processes, he theorises gender as both social practice and social structure. Consistent with the theory of social constructionism set out above, Connell (1987; 1995; 2000; 2005) theorises gender from a discursive perspective.

For Connell (2000, p. 28), gender is a social practice consisting of actions configured into larger units, thus when he speaks of masculinity and/or femininity he speaks of "configurations of gender practice". With an emphasis on the *process* of configuring practice over time, masculinity and femininity are understood to be gender projects (or accomplishments, as described above). As a configuration of practice, masculinity exists in culture as a subject position in the process of representation. Connell (2000) suggests that while individual practice may accept and function to reproduce this positioning, it may also confront and contest it. By conceptualising gender as the product of processes of negotiation, choice and human activity, Connell (1995) emphasises the multiple, local and contextual nature of gendered identity.

In describing gender as a social structure, Connell (1995) conceptualises gender as one way in which social practice is organised. For Connell (1987), the concept of social structure expresses the patterns of constraint acting upon social practice within social relations. As such, the material, cultural and psychic practices that reproduce masculinities can be examined by looking at particular social relations in specific contexts (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003).

In linking his account of gender as social practice to his account of gender as social structure, Connell (1995) suggests that social structure not only constrains and organises practice, but that it also emerges from practice. In this way gender relations are formed through people's practical activities. Connell (1995, p.65) thus describes the practices constructing masculinity (and femininity) as "onto-formative": human actions create realities that then constrain and set the scene for future practice.

The concept of gender cannot only refer to discursive practice however, as there is an undeniable bodily dimension to gender as it exists in culture and as it is lived by individuals[3]: masculinity *refers to* male bodies (Connell, 2000). Following this, Connell (2000, p. 12) describes gender as the way in which "bodies are drawn into history"; men's bodies are "addressed, defined and disciplined … by the gender order of society". For Connell (1995, p. 61) though, it is not enough that bodies are merely the objects of symbolic practice, and he wants to assert the agency of the body in social process:

> "With bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern… (which) might be termed body-reflexive practice".

Connell (2002a) uses the concept of 'body reflexive practice' to refer to the process by which bodily practices are linked to social structures. The basic circuit of body reflexive practice follows the formula of onto-formative practice as explicated above; practices in which bodies are involved form social structures and personal trajectories which provide the conditions for new practices in which bodies are addressed and involved[4]. Connell (2002a) uses the term 'social embodiment' to describe this same

[3] Connell (1987; 1995) argues that the physical sense of being male (or female) is central to our cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender, he argues, is a certain size and shape, a certain feel to the skin, certain postures and ways of moving, the possession of certain physical skills and the lack of others and certain possibilities in sex.

[4] One example of the operation of this circuit provided by Connell (1995) comes from an interview with a man he calls Don Meredith in which Don recounts his first sexual experience with a woman.

process, and explains that social embodiment involves not only an individual's conduct but also the conduct of groups and institutions. From here it can be seen that gender involves social embodiment. To be clear: "gender relations form a particular social structure, refer to particular features of bodies, and form a circuit between them" (Connell, 2002a, p. 48). Thus, Connell (1995) argues, it is through body reflexive practices that both individual lives and the social world are formed.

Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (2003) point out that one strength associated with pro-feminist analyses of masculinities is the connection between masculinities and wider social and economic forces. Because gender is only one way in which social practice is ordered, it necessarily interacts with other structures organising social practice such as class, race and sexual orientation (Connell, 1995; 2000). These intersections of race, sexuality, class and gender have implications for the construction and analysis of masculinities: various forms of masculinity are not only constructed in relation to femininity but also in relation to other forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995). While the oppression of women is a key mechanism linking various forms of masculinity, Connell (1987) argues that there is a sexual politics within masculinity and that another important element in the reproduction of men's power over women is the marginalisation and subordination of certain other masculinities (Connell, 1987). Connell (1995) identifies four types of relations occurring between masculinities that construct the main patterns of masculinity in the Western gender order: hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalisation.

During this sexual encounter Don experienced the bodily pleasure of having a finger inserted in his anus which, Connell (1995) explains, had a social effect: while Don self-identified as heterosexual, he was led by this experience to fantasise about sexual relations with another man, which, in time, lead to real homosexual encounters.

Hegemony

Connell (1987; 1995, p. 77) draws on the concept of hegemony[5] in order to theorise the social relations occurring between different masculinities, and defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women". Hegemonic masculinity is a set of prescriptive norms that, while very public, are not necessarily lived by many men (Connell, 1995). In addition, Connell (1995) suggests that those men who are perceived to embody the ideal are not necessarily the most powerful people, and he argues that, "the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support" (Connell, 1987, p. 185). Within Western culture, hegemonic masculinity is widely agreed to belong to those male bodies that are white, middle-class and heterosexual, and it is against this standard of masculinity that other masculinities and other men's bodies are evaluated (Kimmel & Messner, 1995; Petersen, 1998). Such masculinity is argued to embody characteristics such as success and status, independence, aggressiveness and dominance (Herek, 1987). In addition to being defined positively, Herek (1987, p.73) argues that it is also defined by what it is not, that is as "not being compliant, dependant or submissive, not being effeminate in physical appearance or mannerisms; not having relationships with men that are sexual or overly intimate".

Subordination, Complicity and Marginalisation

Other social structures interacting with gender impact on the construction of various masculinities as dominant or subordinate. For example, Connell (1987) argues that the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, and that a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual because of its association with femininity.

[5] The concept of hegemony was originally introduced into sociology by Gramsci in his analysis of class relations in Italy, and was used to refer to the manner in which a particular social group "claimed and sustained a leading position in social life" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). What is important is that this power is invoked through consent and not coercion (Connell, 1987).

Masculinities complicit with hegemonic masculinity include those constructed around the benefits of patriarchy without being aggressively in defense of men's power over women. These masculinities, I would argue, account for the majority of men who do not subscribe to traditional ideas about male and female roles in social life and who, as Connell (1995, p. 80) suggests, "respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women (and) do their accustomed share of the housework".

The interplays between gender and other organizing social structures impact upon the positioning of various forms of masculinity within the gender hierarchy. Marginalized masculinities refer to those forms of masculinity produced in oppressed or exploited groups (Connell, 2000). While they may conform to hegemonic ideals, they are socially "de-authorized" on the basis of their minority status in another dimension (along the lines of race, for example) (Connell, 2000, p. 31).

In summary, 'masculinity' for Connell (1987; 1995; 2000; 2005) refers simultaneously to "a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture". Being a man involves taking on and negotiating dominant ideals of masculinity; men's identity strategies are thus constituted through their positioning in relation to these ideals (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). With the caveat that these terms – hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization – do not refer to fixed personality types but to configurations of practice within a changing social structure, Connell (1995) suggests that these relationships go some way towards providing a framework for the analysis of specific masculinities.

Critique of the Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity

Jefferson (2002) argues that, despite Connell's (1995) careful formulation of the concept and emphasis on the relational nature of masculinity, the concept of hegemonic masculinity remains problematic. He points out that there is a tendency by researchers to reify the concept, to reduce hegemonic masculinity to a set of 'manly' traits. To render it static in this way is contrary to Connell's (1995; 2005, p. 76) theorizing of the concept as something that is constantly negotiated and struggled

over; "'hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type". While Jefferson (2002) acknowledges that this problem is related to the concepts' subsequent usage, he suggests that the problem may also have arisen from Connell's (1995) consistent use of the term in its singular form; while he talks of a range of subordinate and marginalized masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is never referred to in the plural. Connell (2002b; 2005) never addresses the specifics of Jefferson's (2002) critique of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, but does acknowledge in response to this challenge that it may be time to reconsider the concept. Nevertheless Connell (2002b; 2005) argues, on the basis of its wide usage, that the concept of hegemonic masculinity as formulated by himself is still essential in that it provides a much needed way of recognising diversity and power relations among men and between men and women.

In order to avoid the reification of forms of masculinity, it is necessary to retain an emphasis on their discursive nature. For MacInnes (1998, p. 1), gender exists only as "an ideology people use in modern societies to imagine the existence of differences between men and women on the basis of their sex where in fact there are none". For MacInnes (1998) then, the plural versus singular use of these concepts is not a problem because masculinity does not exist in the first place. Following this argument, Gill (2003, p. 38) suggests that so called 'types' of masculinity are best conceptualised as discourses which are drawn on "in different ways at different times in different forums for different occasioned practices".

Other critiques involving the concept of hegemonic masculinity have implications for the practical analysis of data. For example, Speer (2001) complains that the concept is rarely explained in a way that would enable one to identify it in one's data. Wetherell & Edley (1999), interested in how men position themselves in relation to conventional notions of masculinity, are also concerned that the notion of hegemonic masculinity is not sufficient for understanding the real life, everyday negotiation of masculine identities by men. They argue that it is not clear how the types of relationships occurring between masculinities as set out by Connell (1987; 1995) actually impact upon and regulate men's lives. Connell (1995) never specifies the exact content of the prescriptive social norms constituting hegemonic masculinity, and

for Wetherell & Edley (1999) it is unclear whether there is only one type of hegemonic masculinity at any point in time or whether a number of hegemonic strategies exist creating tensions for men between the different forms as they move across social practices. So, while the framework provided by Connell (1987; 1995) is useful in theory, Wetherell & Edley (1999) are left wondering what conformity or resistance to (the discourse of) hegemonic masculinity might look like in practice.

Attempting to find a solution to this problem, Wetherell & Edley (1999) suggest that the answer lies within the field of ethnomethodolgy. Whereas for Connell (1995a in Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 160, emphasis theirs) masculinity is a "*practical* accomplishment", social practice within ethnomethodology is defined as "practical *accomplishment*". The difference between these two approaches to social practice is subtle, and perhaps the clearest way to explain it is to say that, within ethnomethodology, practice is not regulated by past practice and solidified into social structure (as it is for Connell, 1995) but structure is created right here and now out of participants' activities (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Connell's (1995) theory of practice might be described as taking a "top-down" perspective, as he emphasizes the structure of the social field within which social actors operate. Ethnomethodologists, however, are more focused on studying the sequences of behavior that make up interactions (described as a "bottom-up" perspective) (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Here less emphasis is placed on the operation of larger structures of power, and more attention is paid to the actual daily activities involved in (for example) *being* a man (Wetherell & Edley, 1998). The focus is on people's understandings of how to be in social situations and how they make sense of their activities, how social rules are used, made relevant and managed in accounting for their actions (Wetherell & Edley, 1998). Dull & West (1991) elaborate on the concept of accountability by explaining that, to the extent that people know they will be held accountable for their activities, they will design their actions in terms of how others might characterize them. In terms of gender then, they argue that sex categories provide a popular resource for characterizing social action, and that "persons engaged in virtually *any* activity can hold themselves accountable and be held accountable for their performance of that activity *as women* or *as men*" (West & Fenstermaker, 1993, p. 157, emphasis theirs). For Wetherell & Edley (1999) the understanding of practice as a concrete

phenomenon provides the framework for an analysis of situated practice that Connell's (1995) theory lacks. Before going on to specify my research question, it is important to look at what work has been done in South Africa in the area of masculinities.

South African Masculinities

The social transformation occurring in South Africa as a result of the country's transition to democracy in 1994 has encouraged an increase in interest among local academics in South African masculinities. With its emphasis on the principles of equality the post-apartheid government has been progressive in developing gender policy, and the demise of our previously patriarchal ruling system has been accompanied by significant changes in gender relations (Morrell, 2001). As a result:

> "The first decade of democracy in South Africa has … exposed previously hidden sexual practices and abuses, confronted and unseated traditional gender hierarchies, created the space for the construction and expression of new masculinities and catapulted matters of sexuality into the spotlight" (Reid & Walker, 2005, p. 1).

Work on South African masculinities is perhaps best represented by four collections of papers: two edited books entitled *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (Morrell, 2001) and *Men Behaving Differently* (Reid & Walker, 2005), and two special editions of two local journals, *Agenda* (1998, vol. 37) and the *Journal of Southern African Studies* [6](1998, vol. 24(4)). Two broad themes run across these texts, namely an emphasis on the multiplicity of South African masculinities and the investigation of the relationship between masculinity and the social transition occurring within the country. Thus the majority of research on South African masculinities is about masculinities in flux; in a state of reconfiguration and change (Reid & Walker, 2005). The special issue on masculinities in Southern Africa in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* is focused on South African history and the impact of colonialism and

[6] It may be of interest that a special issue of the South African journal *Psychology in Society* entitled 'Masculinity in Transition' is currently being prepared for publication in late 2007.

capitalism on gender relations (Morrell, 2001). Because South African society is one characterised by much interpersonal violence, violence is a dominant concern in work on local masculinities and five of the ten articles in this special edition deal with this issue (i.e. Mager (1998); Breckenridge (1998); Glaser (1998); Swart (1998); Mooney (1998)).

Agenda approaches men and the study of masculinities as an essential part of gender analysis and all gender initiatives (e.g. Oyegun, 1998), and many of the articles and interviews included in this issue report on local organisations and programmes working with men (and women) on issues related to gender equity (e.g. Appolis, 1998; Daphne, 1998; Khumalo, 1998; Parenzee, 1998). Other articles challenge ideas about dominant South African masculinities and explore the operation of these for black and white men, for example Epstein (1998) shows how, under apartheid, racial identity played a central role in the performance of masculinity by men and how one version of masculinity comes to prescribe male behaviour. She considers the position of most black men who, as a result of their material circumstances, are likely to resist this dominant notion of masculinity (Morrell, 1998). Ratele (1998) explores the meaning of 'blackness' and masculinity and argues that the politics of raced identities are ill-equipped to deal with differences within 'blackness', and Reddy (1998) explores challenges to dominant perceptions of masculinity and heterosexual prejudice resulting from the renegotiation of local homosexual masculinities.

The articles contained within the special edition of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* were a selection of those presented at a Colloquium on Masculinities in Southern Africa held in 1997, and most of the contributions to Morrell's (2001) book, *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, are from this same colloquium. In addition to examining masculinity in terms of performance, social relationships and sexuality, the book contains a section focusing on the masculine body in action. Two of the articles in this section deal with masculinity and the male body in relation to violence: Cock (2001) explores understandings among individuals (involved in the supply of and demand for small arms) of guns as the cause of and solution to criminal violence in Southern Africa, while Swart (2001) investigates the emergence of the Afrikaaner right-wing (AWB) movement and their use of violence in an attempt to keep white

supremacy alive. Hemson (2001) demonstrates how lifesaving has enabled township youth in Durban to realise their bodies in different ways and to develop discourses of masculinity divergent from the discourses of masculinity of their township peers. Thompson (2001) explores the commercialisation (and racialisation) of surf culture in South Africa during the late 1970s and the subsequent rise (and dominance) of professional surfing which resulted in the subordination of recreational surfers (i.e. male, female and black surfers).

The collection of papers contained within *Men Behaving Differently* (Reid & Walker, 2005) focus on men and masculinities in different geographical and institutional locations with the intention of highlighting the varied nature of men's responses to challenges to patriarchal norms and values. For example Niehaus (2005, p. 69) considers the relationship between masculine domination and rape and, on the basis of fieldwork conducted in a village in the South African Lowveld, argues that rape can also represent a violent attempt to assert a dominant masculine persona in the face of a disjuncture between masculine ideals and men's real-life situations: "through rape men demonstrate their heterosexual virility, humiliate economically successful women or enact an ideal of patriarchal rule within households". In contrast to this, Sideris (2005) documents changes in gender relations in a rural area in Mpumulanga province. Based on field- and clinical work in this area she describes a group of men who, in a context in which the use of violence is permitted to maintain male authority within the family structure, are establishing more equal relationships with their wives and children by rejecting violence, doing 'women's work' and relinquishing control over family income (Sideris, 2005).

Outside of these four volumes, research on South African men and masculinities is largely centred around those considered to be 'problematic' in some way. For example Luyt & Foster (2001) compare the negotiation of masculinity by men living in areas characterised by high and low levels of gang activity, and examine hegemonic understandings of masculinity in South African gang culture[7]. Much work

[7] It should be noted that this study also involved the development and use of the Male Attitude Norm Inventory (MANI), a measuring instrument designed to explore dominant ideas around masculinity circulating in general South African society. Luyt (2005) has subsequently revised the MANI and

concentrates on gender based violence (e.g. Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Yoshihama, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004; Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005; Kalichman, Simbayi, Cain, Cherry, Henda, & Cloete, 2007; Kim & Motsei, 2002) and related to this is the study of South African masculinities in relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS and focusing on safe sex practices in relation to gender and power inequalities (e.g. Campbell, 1997; Campbell, Mzaidume & Williams, 1998; Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004; Mane & Aggleton, 2001; Miles, 1992; Strebel, 1993; Wood & Foster, 1995).

Within South African work on masculinities, that most comparable to the current project is Chadwick's (1998) investigation of white hegemonic masculine identity. For this study semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven white, heterosexual men between the ages of 20 and 25 years. All participants were, or had recently been, university students. Using that method of discourse analysis put forward by Parker (1992), Chadwick (1998) identified a range of discourses used by the participants in their talk around masculine identity and the shifting nature thereof[8]. Chadwick (1998, p. 13) notes that unanimous across all eleven accounts was the refusal to identify with conceptions of traditional masculinity, and four discourses (categorised by the researcher as 'replacement' discourses) functioned to construct "traditional macho masculinity" as 'Other'. These were discourses of 'the essentially sensitive man' (in which men were presented as inherently sensitive and men characterised as traditionally masculine are marginalised), 'the move from masculinity to androgyny' (in which traditional masculinity is positioned as belonging to a bygone era and people are not reducible to sex or gender), 'masculinity modelled on women's desires' (in which women are positioned as the instigators of change and men are powerless respondents) and 'positive redefinition of 'being a man'' (in which masculinity, defined negatively, is distinguished from what it means 'to be a man'). In

developed the MANI-II. Luyt (2005) believes that this revised MANI provides a more useful tool for capturing the variability in South African masculinities than other existing measures.

[8] Chadwick (1998) notes that while each discourse is presented separately in her report, they were in actuality inseparably intertwined and participants positioned themselves within and across a combination of these.

contrast to these, Chadwick (1998) notes that two discourses ('the masculine cause' and 'the essentially masculine man') were constructed around the reclamation of traditional masculinity, sought to reposition such masculinity as "'good'" and were resistant to change. Interestingly Chadwick's (1998) discourse of 'the masculine cause', in which traditional masculinity is felt to be under threat in the face of moves towards a more sensitive masculinity, echoes that of the new lad in that changes in masculinity are perceived to occur on a superficial level: "the so-called 'soft side' is one that is not seen to inhere within men, but is something that men 'have to find' to 'get' a woman, and once this has been accomplished the pretence is dropped" (Chadwick, 1998, p. 25). Intersecting with the above discourses was one of 'gender stereotype' in which women were understood in terms of traditional gender roles and transgression was met with criticism by the participants. Lastly, and connected to the 'turn to androgyny' was a 'progressive' discourse where ideas of essential and natural difference between men and women were challenged and identity was not so intimately wound up with gender.

In discussing her findings Chadwick (1998) notes that each discourse involved a recognition of the contested nature of masculinity. She argues that the 'turn to androgyny' represents a positive response to challenges to traditional masculinity; in contrast to the other discourse relying heavily on the distinction between men and women, the 'turn to androgyny'(closely connected to the 'progressive' discourse) embraces change and supports calls to transcend gender. Chadwick (1998, p. 33) suggests that the adoption of this discourse by participants "could represent a significant discursive opening for the strategy of gender reform".

Specifying the Research Question

Thus far I have detailed the sources providing the impetus and framework for the present inquiry. The large body of research suggesting that body image is a problem for men provides a limited understanding of men's embodied experience – body image in these studies is narrowly investigated in relation to satisfaction with body size (and weight) and shape. This work has also been criticized for failing to account for meanings of masculinity in relation to men's appearance related practices. Using

Connell's (1987; 1995; 2000; 2005) sociology of masculinity, and Wetherell & Edley's (1999) revisions to his concept of social practice as a framework, my aim in this study is to go some way towards addressing this gap. Convinced of the usefulness of Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinities in understanding men's lived realities, but in an attempt to avoid the reification of the concept and in acknowledgement of the diversity amongst men, I will attempt to refrain from imposing ideas about the form that hegemonic masculinities might take and leave it to the participants to indicate what normative masculinity might mean to them. My research question is thus as such:

> *How do men, within the context of conversations centring on the body and body modification and maintenance practices, talk about themselves as men and account for their appearance related practices?*

With this formulation of the research question I aim to gain some insight into men's experience of embodiment and how the physical appearance of the body is involved in their daily experience. In this way I hope to contribute towards the investigation of the everyday embodied experience of men, with a focus on the role of physical appearance in constituting that experience. Having specified the research question, it is time to select a method of analysis capable of investigating the discursive strategies used by men in presenting themselves as men.

3 METHODOLOGY

Taking discourse as the focus of its analysis, this study falls into that tradition of discourse analytic research called discursive psychology. Discursive psychology is an approach to concepts commonly used in mainstream psychology based on a constructionist theory of meaning in which language constructs social reality; language and communication are cultural practices within which various realities are constituted (Potter, 1996a; Sampson, 1993). The focus of discursive psychology is on the activities people perform in their practical interactions, as well as the resources that people draw on in the course of performing these activities (Potter, 1996a; Potter & Wetherell, 1995). Commonly defined as a set of statements constructing an object (Parker, 1992), I prefer Potter's (1996b, p. 105, emphasis mine) more inclusive understanding of discourse as "talk *and texts* as parts of social practices", an understanding more focused on the specifics of people's practices than the former.

Selecting a Method for Analysis

Not a unified methodology, it is my job in this section to be clear about the particular type of discourse analysis I will perform. To start then I shall be using that method of discursive analysis as developed by Edley (2001), Wetherell (1998) and Wetherell & Edley (1999) in relation to gender identity and specifically the investigation of masculinity. There is currently an intense theoretical and methodological debate between those discourse analysts working from the perspectives of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and this debate has some relevance to the particular type of analysis that I have chosen as most appropriate for this study. Although similar in theoretical orientation, CA and CDA are very different when it comes to the analysis of data (Korobov, 2001). While a discussion of the finer points of the argument is not appropriate here (see Korobov, 2001 for a good summary), the nature of the debate requires me to briefly address the argument in order to justify my choice of analysis.

The CA/CDA Debate

While both CA and CDA stem from the idea that we construct and are constructed by societal and historical discourses, each has a different methodological way of invoking context (or wider social discourse) in the interpretation of social action; the crux of the argument is the question as to how and when context should be brought into analysis (Korobov, 2001). In contrast to the CA perspective in which social discourse is the project and product of participants' speech, proponents of CDA are of the view that social discourse produces and is produced by subjects (Korobov, 2001). Inherent in this latter perspective is the idea that social agents are, in part, determined and positioned by discourse. CA argues for a more local conception of context, specifically it is argued that "'one should take for analysis only those categories that people make relevant (or orient to) and which are procedurally consequential in their interactions'" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 4). CD analysts are criticized for importing preconceived theoretical categories into their analysis of interaction. For example, CD analysts are accused of invoking the relevance of concepts such as hegemony and power into interactions when it is unclear as to how (and indeed whether) participants are themselves orienting towards them (Korobov, 2001).

One of the main problems with the CA approach as argued by Wetherell (1998), and with whom I concur, is that the microanalysis of the nature of social interaction occurs at the expense of broader social and political issues. In line with CDA, she argues that the positions taken by subjects in conversation are those selected from a range of available options, and are reflective of larger social patterns of interpretation that form the basis of interaction. Wetherell (1996, p. 89; 1998) thus emphasises the importance of interrogating the taken-for-granted discursive back-cloth that organises and enables the realisation of positions by subjects in interaction, for it is the taken-for-granted nature of relationships that prevents contradictions in circumstances from being noticed.

A Proposed Solution to the Debate and the Chosen Method of Analysis

In developing their particular methodology, Wetherell & Edley (1999, p. 338) argue that a synthesis of insights from the tradition of CA with those based on post-

structuralist or Foucauldian notions of discourse (such as CDA) will provide for a more "adequate" discursive psychology. They suggest that their synthetic approach "best captures the paradoxical relationship that exists between discourse and the speaking subject", allowing us to account for the fact that people are simultaneously the products and producers of language (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 338). To reiterate, Wetherell & Edley (1999) argue that when people speak, their utterances are not only meaningful in relation to those that came before, but are drawn from a repertoire of terms provided for them by much broader and collective patterns of social understanding. Thus, whilst convinced by the CA notion of the 'action orientation' of talk and the inter-subjective production of organized and structured social activity, Wetherell & Edley (1999) retain the notion of discourse as organized by institutionalized forms of intelligibility and thus insist on placing individuals' utterances within their social, political and historical context. In order to analyze the social agent as positioned by discourse and as "positioning-back" (Korobov, 2001, para. 17), and to remain sensitive to the operation of power within social discourse, Wetherell & Edley (1999) draw on three main concepts, namely *interpretive repertoires*, *ideological dilemmas*, and *subject positions*. Korobov (2001) points out that it is specifically with the interplay of these concepts that these authors attempt to create a synthesis of the two competing methodological camps of CA and CDA.

Interpretive or linguistic repertoires

The concept of the interpretive repertoire forms part of the attempt within discursive psychology to investigate the organization of phenomena commonly understood within mainstream psychology as attitudes, beliefs and attributions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Interpretive repertoires, as defined by Potter & Wetherell (1987, p.149), are "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena". Interpretive repertoires are thus culturally familiar and habitual lines of argument or modes of explanation, and are often organized around specific metaphors and figures of speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998). They are described by Wetherell (1998) as the 'common sense' organizing accountability and serving as the backcloth for the realization of the various positions taken up by social agents in interaction. It is through linguistic repertoires that society is reproduced and justified as people rationalize and make

sense of their place in it (Wetherell, 1996). The analytic concept of the interpretive repertoire, while closely linked to that of discourse (this term is most often used in the context of CDA), is less political in that it places more emphasis on human agency in the flexible deployment of language (Edley, 2001). As Wetherell (1996) points out, people are aware of a wide range of repertoires relating to particular topics and are capable of producing discrepant and contradictory lines of argument, thus the concept offers speakers a wide range different potential positions (Edley, 2001). The goal of analysis then, as neatly summed up by Korobov (2001), is to find interpretive repertoires at work, investigate the manner in which they are being utilized and to determine where the boundaries lie between them.

Subject positions

The variety of interpretive repertoires available for any topic allow for varying 'subject positions', described as locations taken up by social agents in relation to a topic as they work to construct a version of who they are within a particular interaction (Korobov, 2001). Post-structuralist (and CDA) accounts of the concept conceive of the social agent as constituted by a collection of subject positions constructed by a variety of discourses (Wetherell, 1998). Based on her experience with analysis however, Wetherell (1998) suggests that it is a mistake to take discourse as the constituting and active agent. She argues that what fuels subject positioning is the social agents' orientation to their setting as well as the emergent conversational activities; the invocation of various positions is negotiated in response to the immediate interaction the agent finds them self in. Subject positions are thus local, highly situated and occasioned (Wetherell, 1998). Following this, the manner in which an agent positions them self can only partly be described as a consequence of the discourse to which that position can be assigned (Wetherell, 1998).

Ideological dilemmas

The analytic concept of ideological dilemmas functions, according to Korobov (2001), to connect the concept of interpretive repertoires with subject positions. Edley (2001) describes ideological dilemmas as 'lived ideologies', that is, the practices, beliefs and values belonging to a given society or culture. Similar in nature to

interpretive repertoires, lived ideologies are circulating in society, enabling shared understanding and thus social interaction (Edley, 2001). However, Edley (2001) suggests that the concept of ideological dilemmas carries a further implication: they imply that different ways of talking about the same object or event arise not only spontaneously and locally within interaction, but develop simultaneously as opposing positions within a particular socio-historical context. Billig et al. (1988 in Edley, 2001, p. 203) argue that one of the most crucial features of such lived ideologies is that they are characterised by inconsistency and contradiction and, as such, often contain the "'seeds of (their) own negation'". Thus, according to Edley (2001), they do more to generate argument and deliberation than they do to solve any issue. Korobov (2001) explains that ideological dilemmas are indexed in the tension that occurs as a subject actively manages their positioning within interpretive repertoires. Practically then, analysis involves recognising the dilemmas managed by agents as they resist or affirm different versions of social sense-making (Korobov, 2001).

The Suitability of Wetherell & Edley's (1999) Discursive Psychology for This Study

While Korobov (2001) criticizes Wetherell & Edley (1999) for not stepping far from the shadow of CDA in attempting to combine insights from the CA and CDA traditions, a more critical analysis is consistent with an approach to gender as a structure of social relations and thus is felt to be more appropriate for an analysis of masculinities. Other advantages of Wetherell & Edley's (1999) synthesis for an analysis of masculinity include:

1. A focus on discourse that allows for an investigation of the deliberative nature of identity. In particular, it allows for an examination of how masculine identities are produced and managed in talking about the management of physical appearance and the male body.

2. The concept of interpretive repertoires provides a concrete means for the identification of the social norms constructing masculinities.

3. The concept of subject positioning in particular provides a practical way for investigating the impact of ideals of masculinity (or hegemonic masculinity) in the everyday lives of men.

The Material for Analysis

The material for the analysis comes from a series of in-depth individual interviews conducted with a convenience sample of fifteen men between the ages of 18 and 38. All of the men were volunteers and are identified in this report by initials only. The men were not asked about their sexuality, but during the course of the interviews it became clear that each identified as heterosexual. All fifteen men were white and middle-class in terms of income. The majority of participants (SB, WB, OF, NB, TM, RL and AT) were master's students in the department of psychology at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Being a master's student in this same department myself, I was acquainted with each of these men and approached them individually on campus to ask them whether they would be prepared to be interviewed as a part of my study. Of all the men OM, a master's student in the department of engineering at UCT, was the most well known to me and I conducted my first interview with him. Three participants were graphic designers working at various advertising agencies in Cape Town; JM is the brother of OM and thus also well known to me, while LW and DP were the friends of a friend who kindly agreed to help me find participants for this study. GG (an old school friend) works as an IT consultant and MD (my brother) works as a barman. DM, a friend of OM, is a stage manager and AM, the partner of a work colleague, is the sales manager for an electronic construction company.

Besides for two interviews that lasted for two and a half hours each, the interviews were mostly between 60 and 90 minutes in length. At the beginning of each interview I provided a brief introduction to the topic, explaining my interest in talking to men about issues relating to appearance and masculinity. The interviews were very loosely structured; my aim was to provide a framework for the interview but also to allow the participant to direct the flow conversation. Towards the middle or end of each conversation I would introduce a series of images of male bodies taken from the June 2006 edition of Men's Health Magazine. Two of these images (appendices A and B) come from that section of the magazine providing information on training

programmes, and focus on the bodies of two highly muscular men. The remaining five images (appendices C through G) were all fragrance advertisements selected for their focus on the male body, and because the representations contained quite different looks to each other. The men expressed great interest in the pictures I had to show them and, I think, quite enjoyed giving their opinions on these. Interestingly, quite a few of the men were curious to know what the other men I had interviewed had said about these images. Often these men had expressed thoughts similar to a lot of other men, and upon hearing this seemed quite pleased that "other guys think the same"! (GG). These pictures proved to be invaluable prompts for further discussion in the interviews, and elicited material that might not have come up otherwise.

Before starting this research project I was concerned that I would not be able to find many men willing to be interviewed about their thoughts on masculinity and their appearance related practices. What surprised me was how readily the men I approached agreed to participate, and how talkative each turned out to be in their interviews; one man (GG) commented on how "cool" it had been "to talk and talk" without being told "to shut up!" I had also been worried that I would receive blank stares in response to my question, "what does 'masculinity' mean to you?" And I did. Often. But instead of just leaving it at that, and despite struggling with the question, my interviewees made real attempts to clarify for both me and themselves what the concept meant in their everyday lives. I really enjoyed talking to each of these men, and their enthusiasm and willingness to engage with the topic of this research is very much appreciated.

The Analysis Procedure

For the analysis that follows, all fifteen interviews were transcribed by the interviewer verbatim. Speaker pauses within and between speaker turns were indicated by one full stop per one-second pause. Emphasized words were italicized, and words broken off were indicated by a hyphen (e.g. 'defens-'). Illegible words were indicated by one 'x' per unclear word.

It seemed that interpretive repertoires, as "culturally familiar and habitual lines of argument" (p. 24 of this report) should be easy enough to recognize. Upon having

read each transcript a number of times without having found anything I could identify as an 'interpretive repertoire', I decided that if I could find an 'ideological dilemma' I would be sure to discover the repertoire behind it. I decided that the way to start would be to look for idioms used by the men in their conversations, and indeed I did find one: "you can't judge a book by its cover"[1]. While only one of the men had specifically used this idiom many of the others subscribed to the thinking behind it, that is that appearances are superficial. Besides for this one pattern (and clue), this particular strategy did not yield much of use. After this I decided to concentrate on one transcript at a time, reading it over and over again in the hope that the patterns I knew must be there would jump out at me. They didn't and I began to doubt the quality of my interviews, thinking that in order to complete this project I would have to re-conduct all fifteen interviews because I hadn't collected the data I needed in the first round! I subsequently realized that if I was looking for *shared* patterns of understanding it would only make sense to read across all of the interviews as I had been doing at the start of my analysis. This time I read through the transcripts with the question, "how are these men presenting themselves to me?" in mind. From the beginning I had found it quite amusing that each man seemed intent on denying any sort of sexual attraction to the half naked male bodies shown to them during their interviews, until I realized that this was obviously quite important to them and that it must therefore be a part of something bigger in the 'presentations of self' that were occurring. This was how the subject position of 'heterosexual'(discussed on p. 55 of this report) was uncovered, and it was in a similar manner that the other subject positions were identified.

Because interpretive repertoires are *so* familiar (and taken for granted) they can remain invisible within interview material for a considerable amount of time. I conducted this analysis by reading and re-reading my interview transcripts until I knew each nearly by heart. Having finally completed my analysis, the following points summarise the manner in which it was done:

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[1] This 'lived ideology' is in direct contrast with the reality that people often do judge books by their covers and that appearance is not irrelevant in everyday life. In this report the subject position of 'the unselfconscious self' (p.45) turned out to be one way in which people are suggested to manage this particular ideological dilemma (see p.74 of this report).

1. I made a note of *everything* that stood out during the first readings of the analysis material; this included the use of idioms, recurrent words and even general ideas that seemed to be commonly held by the interviewees. Things did not always make sense at first but often turned out to be meaningful later. For example, in this study the word "lazy" occurred across nearly all of the transcripts. The use of this word turned out to have a role in the presentation of self as 'unselfconscious' (discussed on pg. 48 of this report).

2. I found it useful to read the transcripts holding the question, "how is this person presenting them self to me?" in mind. This was the most successful strategy employed in my analysis as it was most often the subject position I identified in response to asking this question that alerted me to the interpretive repertoire behind it.

3. I also thought carefully about what assumptions were being made by the men in their accounts. This became easier the more familiar I became with the interview material, and led me to identify at least one interpretive repertoire, namely that of 'sexuality'. The men in this study assumed heterosexuality as the norm, and automatically spoke of physical appearance and masculinity in these terms; the importance of appearance and meanings of masculinity were not considered outside of the bounds of the relationships between men and women (pg. 55 of this report).

4 ANALYSIS

Analysis revealed six interpretive repertoires used by the men in talking about masculinity and bodily appearance, and in relation to which they positioned themselves in accounting for their own body (and specifically appearance) related practices. All fifteen men drew on the concept of 'vanity' in characterizing appearance-related interest and positioned themselves in opposition to this interpretation (The Unselfconscious Self). The interpretive repertoire of 'gender stereotypes' was another used by all fifteen men, this in making sense of what the concept of masculinity meant to them in everyday life (The Untraditionally Masculine Self). 'Sexuality' was yet another repertoire used by all fifteen men in making sense of masculinity and bodily appearance, and this was regularly intertwined with a repertoire of 'popular evolutionary theory' (The Heterosexual Self). Interestingly only one man (DP) drew on the concept of 'identity' in understanding men's attention to their appearance (The Well-Balanced Self). Most of the men understood the images of idealised male bodies shown to them in terms of 'advertising' (or marketing), against which they positioned themselves as non-consumers (The Non-Consumer). Lastly many of the men drew on the concept of 'success' (or status) in denigrating the role of appearance in everyday life (The Ideally Disembodied Self (or Successful Masculinity)). Presented below are the various subject positions assumed by the men during their interviews. Quotes from interviews have been included in order to illustrate claims, and punctuation has been added to these extracts for readability. The men have all been provided with pseudonyms, and are identified in the text by initials only.

The Unselfconscious Self

Among the various interpretive repertoires used by the men interviewed by Gill et al. (2005) in making sense of their appearance-related practices was one of vanity and the rejection thereof. Similarly, the men in this study made sense of their own and others appearance-related concern in relation to vanity and, while none of them denied taking an interest in what they look like, the men used various means to guard

themselves against judgments of conceit. Those who admitted an interest in their appearance, for example, often qualified and effectively minimized the extent of their concern:

> OF: I cannot claim that I am not concerned, as I said before I won't buy just any clothes but I mean, I would put a time on it out of my twenty four hours in a day, how many minutes I spend being concerned about what I look like? I think if you reach five minutes that's a lot.

One man who, unlike any of the other men, did admit to being mildly concerned about his physique also qualified his concern by stating "but I am not into fashion or anything like that" (NB). While the men expressed differing levels of concern, all took care to present themselves as "not really all that worried" (SB). Occasionally women served as a foil against which men positioned themselves in terms of their concern:

> MD: I've never taken like more than twenty minutes to get ready, I mean sometimes girls take like weeks to plan what they're gonna wear, I'll like open my cupboard, that's clean, put it on, it's not a big deal for me.

In talking about their appearance related practices, the majority of men in this study placed great emphasis on 'function'; nearly nothing was done purely for the sake of aesthetics. One man went into great detail about how his wardrobe was designed to be fashionable and yet practical:

> DM: I do value my appearance in terms of how I look to other people, I do sort of like to make a decent appearance but then at the same time it has to be functional so like I'll wear something that will look good but it'll be functional, like I'm very functional minded in terms of when I buy a pair of boots or a pair of shoes or jeans or something I'll always look at has it got enough pockets that I can carry stuff in, will I

> be able to use it for work if I need to and the shoes, like are they gonna last for more than two months?

Amusingly, two men even justified their use of sunglasses in instrumental terms, with DM stating that he wore them "because, well, it just has to do with the sun and the light". Similarly, many of the men in this study used various skin-care products but justified their use in terms of the short term effects of the products as opposed to any long term benefits that might come from looking after ones' skin. Long term goals of skin care were often explicitly rejected:

> OM: It's not actually about long term skin health, I haven't really thought about looking young in years it's more about, you know, just trying to get the oil off my skin so I don't feel oily and just feeling clean.

Most of these men also denied having had any active involvement in initiating the use of such products, stating that it had been their girlfriend or mother who had introduced them to "proper products" such as face wash and moisturizer. In contrast to these men however, AM and TM described washing and moisturizing their faces as part of their everyday routine and as having a ritual function:

> AM: It's like basically my start to the morning, to the day, the whole routine process…it's just part and parcel of the ritual as in 'getting rid of the old and starting a new day' type attitude.

> TM: Well [skincare products] feel nice, they make your skin feel clean, I'd imagine it's the same thing that make-up does in a funny ritualistic sort of way you know, if you get to put on your makeup and you get to get all ready and in the process you find your zone or whatever, I mean [for] guys it's the same thing they do their hair and stuff like that.

It has been suggested that the performance of appearance related practices in a ritualized manner symbolically marks the (affective, imaginative, cognitive) transition

of the self from one situation to another (Crossley, 2005), and the quotes above illustrate this. In addition, these two men locate their skin care within the range of routine morning practices which are so widely practised that they cannot be said to reflect anything distinctive about the self practising them (Crossley, 2005). By so doing, these two men could be argued to have successfully distanced themselves from a position of vanity.

Three men in this study (two of whom were conscious of their weight and one who felt he had a problem with hair loss) avoided being positioned as inappropriately concerned with their appearance by claiming a sense of humour around these issues:

> DM: I think that's also the thing is that what helps is that I can laugh at myself, I can make jokes about myself and it doesn't bother me.

In response to the two images of muscular men presented to them (appendices A and B), most men admitted that "it would be nice to look like that" (GG) (or, at least, "more like that" (RL)), but also recognized that it was not easy to achieve such a muscular physique. Nevertheless, seven of the fifteen men interviewed felt that it would be possible for them to achieve a similar look if they took up weightlifting. What was striking was that each man (with the exception of the body builder) described himself as too "lazy" (or "idle") to put in the time and effort required to achieve a similar physique. One man even described himself as too lazy to start using a separate face wash as opposed to the soap he used in the shower. It is suggested that laziness is not a quality most people would readily admit to, but that in this context the statement serves to emphasize a lack of what might be perceived as excessive concern around physical appearance.

Out of fourteen of the men interviewed, three attended gym; two reported that it was primarily for health purposes and the third (NB) went "only for karate". As reported by Gill et al. (2005), the men in this study who did not attend gym characterized gym culture as narcissistic ("you can see its all about aesthetics", AT) and were negatively critical about men that work out in gyms ("gym's for a select breed of guy", TM). Interviewees described men who attend gym as "pretentious" and regularly accounted for other men's activities at gym in terms of 'ego':

> WB: You go to gym and you get these guys with the massive ego's and they try and lift like thirty times their body weight and its actually ridiculous because you can actually fuck up your back and any proper personal trainer will say when you go to the gym leave your ego at home.

In contrast to all of these men the fifteenth interviewee (AM) described himself as a bodybuilder and was a regular gym-goer who engaged in intense work outs and performance supplementation in order to build his desired physique. As in Gill et al. (2005), who found only two men out of 140 willing to characterize gym attendance as being about achieving a certain look, only AM was prepared to admit that his gym attendance had ever had anything to do with appearance:

> AM: Most guys that go to gym they don't go to gym for the health part they go to gym to look good, to make people look at them, make the women look at them, it's the biggest part of it um, and I think that's where it started off for me and then I got involved in the whole exercise- started doing personal training, and the whole holistic approach I think for me started coming into it and then from there I went into bodybuilding you know, not actually, funny enough not for the way it looks but more for the challenge.

For AM, crossing the line between weight training and body building was crossing the line between exercise aimed at looking good and attracting women, and exercise that was a part of something more meaningful; part of what he later described as "a lifestyle". Despite attributing to other men (and indeed other body builders[1]) the desire to look attractive, he consistently denied that his own body building had anything to do with his physical appearance.

In their study, Gill et al. (2005) found that the discourse of rejecting vanity was most prevalent in talk around cosmetic surgery, where vanity was repeatedly rejected as

[1] "Ninety five percent of guys do body building to look good, to look hot so women can look at them" (AM).

legitimate grounds for surgery. Perhaps unsurprisingly all interviewees in the current study distinguished between 'reconstructive' and 'aesthetic' plastic surgery, with 'disfigurement' as the result of an illness or accident unanimously considered a legitimate case for cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery, for those not disfigured by accident or illness, was taken to indicate extreme and inappropriate concern with appearance:

> OM: I know if I was considering something like cosmetic surgery I would feel embarrassed about the whole thing you know, I'm not supposed to care that much about my appearance.

While not all men were completely against 'aesthetic' plastic surgery, there were limits as to what was done "for the right reasons" with vanity consistently constituting illegitimate grounds for surgery. The examples given as to what sort of surgeries were acceptable indicated that the limits between vanity and legitimate cases for surgery fell in different places for different men, nevertheless each man presented his legitimate case with the confidence that it was based on an objective and shared assessment. In addition to specifying cases deemed appropriate for aesthetic plastic surgery, many of the men in this study argued a general rule for deciding whether a particular case was an appropriate one for surgery or not. This line of reasoning employed the criterion of attractiveness to determine whether a desire for cosmetic surgery could be characterized as vain and thus illegitimate:

> WB: Cosmetic surgery, I'm kind of okay with it but it just depends, I mean if you're kind of fairly good-looking as it is to go and get cosmetic surgery to make you super good-looking if you're fine to begin with is not really right.

In their analysis Gill et al. (2005, p.52, emphasis theirs) note that what is interesting about their interviewee's talk around cosmetic surgery is that the notion of vanity is "*entirely flexible*"; that one man's legitimate case for surgery is another's example of surgery 'for the wrong reason'. While this observation applies to the findings of the current study, an additional observation regarding the association between cosmetic

surgery and women can be made. Once again unsurprisingly, 'aesthetic' cosmetic surgery was generally more readily associated with women:

> RL: [My friend] doesn't care [about his ears that stick out] so obviously his focus isn't on his appearance which is quite nice, I mean it's not important to him which, if I had to choose, I'd rather be that guy than the lady that's gone for twenty procedures in her life and that's what she's about.

Women's desire for surgery was often characterized in terms of dissatisfaction with appearance, while the surgeries men were deemed to go for were often those that would be called 'reconstructive'. While aesthetic cosmetic surgery for women was spoken about in terms of wanting to look younger or 'better' and as understandable in certain cases, aesthetic cosmetic surgery for men was regularly negatively attributed to insecurity and feelings of inadequacy:

> MD: [In response to a question around penis augmentation] you know, that's just male, ja, that's them not being happy with themselves, it's just purely just insecurities, I mean it has to be - you wouldn't change anything about you if you were completely happy about yourself and like confident and secure and stuff.

What is interesting is that the discursive presentation of self as 'unselfconscious' often seemed to me to be in contradiction with the material presentation of self that I was looking at across the table. At the same time as interviewees' were asserting their disinterest in all things 'appearance', I was convinced in many cases that this could not be the whole truth. I knew that RL organised his short hair into a spiky mess every morning, while MD sported an arm full of tattoos and clearly coloured his hair. OF has a permanent growth of two-day stubble and regularly wears sleeveless vests that show off his muscular torso. I also struggle to believe that a body builder has no real interest in what his body actually looks like. In addition, I personally did not consider any of the men I interviewed to be unattractive, and can't help but feel that it must be easier to disclaim an interest in appearance in the absence of what might be considered by others to be unattractive.

The Untraditionally Masculine Self

As mentioned in the previous chapter, interviews conducted by Chadwick (1998) with eleven men and centred around personal understandings of masculinity revealed an overwhelming rejection of 'traditional macho masculinity'. The traditionally masculine man, Chadwick (1998) notes, was constructed by her interviewees as 'Other' and as belonging to a bygone era. Similarly a number of the men in this study, in response to questions around their understandings of masculinity, drew on traditional ideas of masculinity and positioned such masculinity as no longer appropriate:

> DP: I think the traditional masculinity is really heavily uncool these days as well, I think it's uh, it sort of symbolises aggression and lots of negative things, negativity towards females and basically caveman type mentality.

> JM: I think like the general view of [masculinity] is kind of strength and kind of bravado and all that sort of nonsense but I think that those concepts are largely redundant in the modern age you know, we don't need to be super physically strong anymore we don't need to be like necessarily all that brave in the classic sense of the word.

In contrast to descriptions of the traditionally masculine man given by the men in Chadwick's (1998) study, and possibly due to the context of the current interviews, descriptions of the traditionally masculine man by the men in this study often included ideas around physicality; traditionally masculine men were described as having "bulging muscles", being "quite big", "tough looking", "sporty", athletic and strong. The men often described images of masculine men that occurred to them in response to the term "masculinity":

> GG: When I hear masculinity I think of like a big guy with his shirt off, sweat dripping down, like digging a hole or something, that's always really the picture I've got.

As in the quote above, these images often involved traditionally masculine bodies engaged in some sort of traditionally masculine activity (other examples included sailing a yacht and swinging an axe). Ideas around traditional masculinity often included stereotypical character types which were valued negatively by the men in this study, and included the "man's man", "captain of the rugby team", the "rugger bugger" and, in one case, the "muscular, hairy-chested six foot four rugby playing Neanderthal". While the men found it quite easy to conjure up images and ideas about traditional masculinity, the majority of men found it difficult, when asked, to explain what masculinity meant to them personally. It was clear, however, that the men dis-identified with traditional ideas about masculinity as all fifteen men proceeded to position themselves in opposition to the traditional models of masculinity that they had drawn upon:

> OM: I've never been like a man's man, um, a hardcore guy, I've never been a big sports fan, I don't feel the need to be a tough guy um…I'm very into things like classical music and singing and these sorts of things and that's traditionally something that's a softer sort of thing, it's not as masculine.

> RL: I've never been your sort of typical male you know, I guess I'm just a fairly conventional guy.

Based on a number of data sets Wetherell & Edley (1999) suggest that people often draw upon the interpretive repertoire of stereotypes when they are required to reflexively consider their place in society. They explain that by describing the social world in terms of stereotypes, a space between the social and the personal is opened up in which the subject can position them self as merely 'ordinary'. The men in this study were clearly invested in presenting themselves as 'ordinary guys', however it is here that a contradiction occurs. While one man in this study felt that all men possessed a certain "sensitivity", most seemed to feel that, as individuals, they were quite different from men in general:

> TM: I find myself sometimes unique in that a lot of guys shy away from intuition, like non-sexist humour, um emotionality.

> AT: Well I don't um, like when I wanna be affectionate to another man I don't necessarily, I give him a hug or something which is kind of like weird for most guys, I also like to talk about when I'm feeling insecure and stuff.

In contrast to most of the men who described themselves as simply being different, some men understood their difference to be a matter of conscious choice:

> OF: I've seen my parents cry and my partner has seen me cry, it's just a display of emotion where you would say, 'this masculine picture of complete strength at all times I don't need to adhere to'.

> LW: [Coming out of the military made me realise] that what people expect out of a man is just not what appeals to me you know, it's not something I really want to follow in my life, I don't want to be this big hulking manly man.

In contrast to macho or traditionally masculine men who were described as "maladapted", "hyper-masculine" and "overcompensating", many interviewees felt that a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine traits makes for a "well-rounded" or "well-balanced" person:

> TM: For me it's about being a man and being incredibly secure and proud of that while at the same time being able to integrate a whole lot of typically feminine characteristics...do I consider myself masculine? Yes, do I consider myself slightly feminine sometimes? Ja of course, it's a well rounded person.

Chadwick (1998) noted one discourse in her interviewees' talk around masculinity which she labelled "the turn to androgyny". This discourse resists gender categorisation and constructs people as "'human persons'" (Chadwick, 1998). Often the men interviewed in this study attempted to move away from categorising individuals in terms of gender, preferring to speak in terms of 'people':

> OM: It's a sign of weakness to care too much about your appearance, letting that worry you and preoccupy you, it's an insecurity, it's just a weakness to you, and as a man you should try and have as few weaknesses as you can, but as any person not just a man.

> RL: I sort of measure my worth as a man by my ability to sort of basically deal well, how well I can deal with any situation, but I like to think that if I was a woman I'd also think that you know, it's not what I think is manly because I think a woman should also strive to overcome areas of her life that she finds problematic or challenging.

Chadwick (1998) warns that this discourse, while appearing progressive in its avoidance of the rigid dichotomy of gender, is taken up tactically to accomplish different ends and is often intertwined with less progressive discourse. Indeed, it can be considered to form part of Bordo's (1993) homogenising discourse in which individuals are presented as subscribing to the same ideals and gender is obscured. In addition it is this discourse which has been identified as a manifestation of 'new sexism' (Benwell, 2003). What looks to be an egalitarian point of view actually conceals the fact that the ideals for human behaviour (including those implied in the quotes above) are those traits that have traditionally been associated with masculinity and men as opposed to those that have traditionally been associated with women.

I'm Comfortable with My (Hetero)Sexuality: The Heterosexual Self

The men in this study were not asked about their sexual orientation, nevertheless it became clear during the course of each interview that each of the fifteen men identified as heterosexual. While most men struggled to explain what masculinity meant to them, those who had the most well-developed ideas on the topic often understood masculinity in terms of the heterosexual relationship between men and women:

> JM: I think masculinity is to a large degree how I guess men perceive themselves in the context of their relationships with women and how they view women.

> DP: I think masculinity is about being a man and what a man is and what a man does and how he interacts and the rest of it, and its also in your roles you know, you're a man, you've either got a girlfriend or everybody's got a mother or a sister and the way you act in those parameters.

Popular evolutionary theory regularly provided the dominant framework for making sense of these relationships, and the majority of the men in this study understood the role of physical appearance in social life in terms of heterosexual relationships and attracting a partner. In one case this link was explicitly made:

> JM: I just think it's Darwinism I guess, I mean I think it's like protectional like in history, obviously you wanna pick the best mate you can so everyone's gonna be concerned about what they look like and their physical appearance, because it's the first kind of barrier of entry with relationships with the opposite sex.

Both their own and other men's interest in appearance was understood to be purposeful in that once a "mate" had been acquired there was little reason to be concerned about ones' appearance:

> RL: I think as long as you're young and especially single um, it will be an issue, I guess when guys start getting girlfriends and stuff, start like feeling secure in their relationships and whatever it starts being less of an issue 'cos they're not trynna attract new girls.

> NB: I don't, for me, if anything, this kind of thing wouldn't be about looking in the mirror and being happy, it must be about attracting a girl, if I've got a girl and she's happy with the way I look I don't care, I don't care at all about how I look, you know what I mean?

All of the men at some stage during their interviews signaled their heterosexuality through comments expressing their sexual interest in women, and the subject position of 'heterosexual' was taken up most vehemently in interviewees' responses to the two

images of muscular men (appendices A and B) as well as the two cologne advertisements showing naked male bodies (appendices C and E). While a small number of heterosexual-identified men in the study by Gill et al. (2000) admitted to finding the images of men's bodies they were presented with attractive, the authors note that the majority of heterosexual-identified men communicated this more indirectly through exaggerated denial of their appeal or (in focus groups) through humorous banter. Upon being presented with the two images depicting highly muscular male bodies (appendices A and B), the majority of men in this study immediately expressed their lack of sexual desire for such bodies through humour:

> Int: What is your response to these images?
> AT: Well I'm not turned on!
>
> Int: I was wondering how you might respond to seeing images like these?
> TM: Um, would I want that body? Not in bed with me!

The boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality (and the effeminate) is obviously crossed by engaging in the sexualised evaluation of men's bodies and, despite the invitation by the bodies offered up in the images shown to them, the fifteen men interviewed consistently refused to assume the 'male gaze'. The position of 'gazer' is open to women as well as men however, and it is interesting to note that one man took the position of a female viewer in evaluating the images of male bodies. By so doing he managed to acknowledge that the body he was looking at was sexually attractive and defend against an unwelcome interpretation of homosexuality:

> LW: You know what, its more a sense of not how I respond to seeing it but how I think women will respond to seeing it, it's like I look at that and I think women will find that more desirable than a guy who doesn't have a body like that. I don't personally find that he's got a good body.

The men clearly read the two fragrance advertisements depicting naked male torsos (appendices C and E) as homoerotic, and many were convinced that the advertisements, despite appearing in a men's magazine, were targeted at women:

> SB: That's not for guys, the advert isn't for guys I promise you, no, these are all for partners or girlfriends, maybe this one's for guys [indicating advertisement for Brute (appendix G)] you know, sort of something you can relate to, guys can't relate to that [pointing at advertisement for Kouros (appendix C)].

Only a small number of men acknowledged that the advertisements might appeal to homosexual men. While being invested in the position of 'heterosexual', and in contrast to one man who declared that homosexuality was "just not right", a number of interviewees expressed their 'tolerance' of homosexuality. Not being homophobic was often understood in terms of being comfortable with ones own (hetero)sexuality:

> JM: I don't not like that one [indicating advertisement for Jean Paul Gaultier (appendix E)] anymore than I don't like the others, I mean it's not like this makes me more uncomfortable than anything else, I mean it's a guy without his shirt on like, I hope that I'm comfortable enough with my sexuality that that wouldn't creep me out.

DM extended this line of reasoning to include the appropriation of other traditionally feminine behaviors by men:

> DM: [Being asked about my sexual orientation] made me think for the first time well, why do we do that silly behavior backstage like grabbing a guy's butt and just making fun and it's, it's a case of some people just aren't comfortable with their sexuality and a person, a guy, who's really comfortable with his sexuality is just willing to like, doesn't mind doing commonly feminine things like browsing for clothes and looking for nice sort of deodorants and stuff like that.

At first it appears that the discourse around being comfortable with ones' sexuality is progressive in that it appears to have the potential for positively expanding the repertoire of ways of being and behaving that are open to men; as long as a man is secure in his sexuality, he can engage comfortably with other (homosexual) men and in behaviors traditionally associated with women and femininity. In contrast though, it must be argued that this discourse buys back into the traditionally dominant masculine ideal of heterosexuality by retaining its' position as the standard against which other men are measured. It can be argued that the liberalism (expressed as the acceptance of homosexuality) associated with being comfortable with ones' sexuality is easily afforded by the status attached to being heterosexual. A man's claim to masculinity is not threatened by other people's sexual behavior as long as he can claim and assert his own heterosexuality.

The Well-Balanced Self

In their interviews with 140 men, Gill et al. (2005) uncovered a discourse which they termed "the well-balanced self". While less prevalent than the other discourses uncovered by them, they note that it constituted a significant part of self-definition for those men who used it. This discourse, which covered many areas of life, revolved around not taking things too seriously and a rejection of obsession (Gill et al., 2005). In the present study only one man's sense of self identity clearly conformed to this pattern:

> DP: [In response to the Carolina Herrera advertisement (appendix D)]:
> He looks like he's taking himself too seriously, I definitely wouldn't want to portray that 'cos I don't take myself too seriously (laughing).

However, in contrast to the discourse as discovered by Gill et al. (2005) which incorporated an implicit norm about obsession, DP never once labelled any behaviour of his own or others as obsessive. While the men in the study by Gill et al. (2005, p. 54) often used the terms "perfectionism" and "hyper-perfectionism" in lieu of 'obsession', DP readily admitted to being a perfectionist himself:

> DP: As far back as I can remember back to even when I was a bald cut [sic] little kid I like cut my hair so it was symmetrical I just like, I'm a bit of a perfectionist in certain things and I think that carries over to your appearance, I think that's natural and guys are as vain as girls are, let's face it.

Here DP flouts the regulations belonging to the discourse of 'The Unselfconscious Self' as used by the other interviewees, and positions men alongside women in their concern with appearance. He explains his appearance related practices (and specifically the attention he pays to his hair) as being related to his tendency towards perfection. While DP describes men and women (perhaps rather flippantly) as vain, he goes on to talk about men's attention to their appearance in terms of image:

> DP: I think guys work hard, I remember guys at school they worked very hard at their image even if their image was absolute scruff, you should look like you basically crawled out of the ghetto, they cultivated that carefully I mean your rips had to be in your pants perfectly.

> DP: You couldn't show me a rock star or a sports celebrity who doesn't tailor every hair on his body, even Bob Dylan was quite particular about the way his hair looked, its all image you know, guys are very aware of their image.

In contrast to the other interviewees who associated men's interest in appearance with attracting a partner, DP's understanding of men's involvement in appearance related practices is linked to the concept of image and thus more to the concept of identity. Men's attention to what they look like is repackaged as "having a laugh" as opposed to being obsessive, vain or inappropriate:

> DP: It's good to see young guys just having a laugh with their appearance and just rifting [sic] on their whole sort of identity, it's good, it's a good thing really.

This discourse was also associated with a very liberal attitude towards appearance related practices and cosmetic surgery in particular; DP had no problem with the practice and reported that his fear of surgical procedures was the only thing that would prevent him from undergoing cosmetic surgery if he ever desired it. In contrast to the other men in this study, DP more readily saw the body and appearance as a medium for expressing ones sense of self.

The Non-Consumer

The images shown to the men during the course of their interviews were chosen either because they contained idealized male bodies or because they were felt to depict different images of masculinity. It was hoped that they would act as prompts and elicit talk around masculinities and the significance of idealized representations of the male body for men. Five of the seven images were advertisements for various fragrances (appendices C through D), and two (appendices A and B) accompanied work out programmes. The men interviewed clearly read all of the images as advertisements, and responded to them as such. It was here that the subject position of non-consumer was taken as each man refused to buy into the images presented to them.

In contrast to the men interviewed by Gill et al. (2005), none of the men in this study reported having noticed an increase in the number of images of idealized male bodies in advertising or popular culture. Most recognized that the two pictures of highly muscular men had come from Men's Health Magazine, and felt that such images were to be expected in such a magazine because it aimed to sell its' workout programmes. Gill et al. (2005) note that the men in their study who read such images as aspirational were also the men who believed that they could achieve a similar physique, and the men in this study were the same. Most admitted that they would not say no to having "a Men's Health body", and three men specifically stated that such images were obviously designed to be aspirational. Despite this, none of the fifteen men interviewed reported aspiring to having a similar look, even though most felt that with some hard work they could look like the men shown to them. Interestingly, nearly every interviewee qualified their admiration for the bodies shown to them by acknowledging the work that goes into achieving that kind of physique, and by describing such bodies as "unrealistic" :

> DP: First impression is impressed, I mean respect for the body, I think he looks great but uh, also fully realize that these guys are models, they're not normal guys, they can't go out and eat and drink beer on the weekends in indecent amounts and they obviously have to wax their bodies and they just worked out before their shoot so they don't really look like this either.

> WB: This is kind of a bit not realistic because I realize this guy eats like raw eggs, he goes to gym, you know, six out of seven days a week and takes all these supplements and things like that.

Buchbinder (2004, p. 228) points out that men's magazines focusing on exercise regularly contain images of men who, "despite the fact that they may be shown using exercise machines or weights, do not appear even to have broken out in a sweat, much less to grimace with the sheer physical effort of performing the necessary movements." He argues that the idealized male body thus appears as natural and effortless, and that "like an haute couture garment, that body is intended to be worn with apparent ease and to excite admiration and envy in the beholder" (Buchbinder, 2004). While many men expressed admiration for the physiques presented to them, they clearly refused to buy into the idea that such a look is easily achievable and did not feel that the work involved in building such a body was worth the end result.

A similarly critical distance was assumed in response to the fragrance advertisements presented. Instead of eliciting talk around different models of masculinity and men's bodies, interviewees responded to the images as advertisements and refused to be drawn by them. A commonly repeated phrase in response to the advertisements was "I can't relate to that". The men regularly presented themselves as being able to "see through" advertising:

> WB: This ones kind of too clichéd and obvious, I mean you can see it's advertising you know, if you take this you could get a woman like that which doesn't make sense to me you know, I'm smarter than that.

> JM: I don't really have any thoughts about any of them, I'm very like jaded to advertising, it's so contrived you know, I mean what does a guy almost kissing a girl with a faded city in the background mean really, it's like oh, okay, they live in a city so they must be semi-wealthy and look how young and good looking they are therefore you know, if I use that perfume I'm supposed to be the same, it's just irritating.
>
> Int: So what would work for you then?
>
> JM: Nothing, I donno like for me it would be like a scratch and sniff and I'd go shit, that smells nice and then like that would be it.

Most of the men, such as JM above, reported that they bought or would buy products if they felt they were good, "I don't buy things 'cos of advertising" (MD). In addition, many of the men interviewed were suspicious of men's involvement in certain appearance related practices, for example OM suggested that the recent increase in the number of men undergoing cosmetic procedures could be attributed to "propaganda" as opposed to any real desire on behalf of men to have these procedures. Similarly a large number of men drew on marketing discourse and described cosmetics houses as creating a need rather than responding to it; the recent increase in availability of men's skincare products was attributed to cosmetics houses attempting to increase their customer base and in order to earn more money. Related to the men's perception of advertisements using half naked male bodies as being targeted at women was their construction of women as the primary consumers of men's grooming products:

> NB: [In response to the Kouros advertisement (appendix C)] He's incredibly over tanned and he's got a waxed chest that has been greased up, in a very showy sort of pose, that's just bad, this is aimed at women I think, buy it for their boyfriends… I don't think many of these are aimed at men 'cos I don't think guys buy cologne anyway, it's always their girlfriends and mother that go out and buy that stuff.

A number of interviewees felt that girlfriends were often the ones to make sure that men looked after themselves, and one man described how after having broken up with his girlfriend of four years he had stopped putting as much effort into his appearance.

It is a well-known argument that consumer practice has always been gendered and that the ideal consumer has always been female (Kacen, 2000). It is argued that consumerism and advertising has encouraged a "feminization" of culture because it positions all consumers in the classic role of the female, seen as manipulable, submissive, irrational and lacking in self-restraint (Barthel, 1992, p. 148-9 in Boni, 2002; Kacen, 2000). It is clear that the men in this study subscribed to the traditional gender roles associated with consumer practice when making sense of men's engagement with media images and advertising. In responding to the advertisements the men in this study refused to passively buy into the advertised images and constructed themselves as impervious to the messages advertisers attempt to deliver. They refused to be sold on images and projections of lifestyle, and again used instrumental terms to explain their purchase of products; if it worked well (or smelt good) they would buy it.

The Ideally Disembodied Self (or Successful Masculinity)

Many of the men interviewed subscribed to the notion that 'you can't judge a book by its' cover', and felt that "it would be nice if appearance didn't matter" (RL). Most of the men interviewed in this study felt a certain responsibility to "make a decent appearance" (DM) for the benefit of others:

> WB: Other people do exist in the world and they do look at you, it's kind of inevitable so obviously you do have to be at least a little bit concerned.

However this concern most often referred to those practices engaged in by the majority of people in Western culture, such as those having to do with hygiene and keeping ones' hair reasonably well-kept ("you need to be like reasonably clean and not dress like a hobo (WB)). As previously discussed though, none of the men felt that their appearance was of such concern that they would bother to put in much more

effort to affect it. This was often expressed from a utilitarian point of view as many of them men stated that they couldn't see the point of having a very muscular physique or of undergoing cosmetic surgery:

> JM: See it's kind of like is the ends justifying the means of years and years of gym training you know, big muscular men like this I mean [indicating images from Men's Health (appendices A and B)], to a large degree it's kind of purposeless in the society we live in so all of this is a bit of a show so you can take your shirt off and look built, I mean I'm sure that guy, like, I'll never know what he does with his physical prowess all day.

In the quote above JM implies that spending a lot of time on appearance is not what gets one ahead in this day and age. He goes on to develop his argument:

> JM: I think today largely kind of mental development should like far outstrip physical development because we live in a technological world and I'd say you know a guy who studies really hard and works really hard to develop himself mentally is going to be in a far better position than a guy like this.

While many men's ideas of traditional masculinity included ideas around physicality (see The Untraditionally Masculine Self), a number of men distinguished between mental and physical masculinity and personally valued mental attributes over having a good build ("I think actually a strong character would be more important than looking strong" (MD)). These men explained during the course of their interviews that their goals in life where generally to further their careers and to live a "comfortable life":

> SB: I think about the age I am now and I'm far more, my concerns are so much more external as opposed to the way I look, it's more in terms of getting where I wanna be and what I want to be doing with my life you know, I don't see that I'd ever have the time to be obsessed with the way I look.

These men commonly spoke of success in terms of financial security, job position, being able to provide for a family and what car one drove. For some men there was an association between dress (or what might be better referred to as 'presentation') and wealth or success. For example in response to the suggestion that men are paying more attention to their appearance OM said:

> OM: I think wealthy men have always looked after themselves you know, you've always had barbers and tailors and things like that making fine suites and giving you fine shaves and haircuts and things like that and aftershave and these sorts of things.

Some men felt that if they had the right sort of job for it they would take the opportunity to "power dress", and many responded positively to the image portrayed in the Brut advertisement (appendix G). What it is important to note here though is that for these men dress was read as an indicator of success; the quality of a mans' suit was felt to provide an indication of his pay grade. Only one man (DP) disagreed with this:

> DP: I see a successful man as not having to wear a suit, I see guys wearing suits as being less free than other guys 'cos they have to do it to keep up appearances and I think if you can not have to worry about that that's great
>
> Int: So what does successful mean to you?
>
> DP: Successful means able to live comfortably um, having your own business would mean successful to me because basically being as in control and free of other people.

While some took the suit to indicate power and success, DP took it to indicate a degree of powerlessness. The point here is not so much the fact men's readings of the suit differ however, but that what matters to each of these men is success and that despite having some different conceptions of what constitutes success, they all

involve the traditionally valued masculine traits of independence, wealth, power, status, control and influence.

What is interesting is that a number of men referred back to their school days in talking about the importance of appearance, and mentioned that it had been of greater concern to them at that time but that different things become more important as one gets older. Despite having minimized the extent of his concern for his body (see The Unselfconscious Self), NB admitted that he might not be as unconcerned with his appearance if he stopped his karate training, and went on to suggest that his appearance mattered more to him than he would like it to. He offered the following explanation for this:

> NB: I'm still studying so maybe to kind of look good is a success in some way um, if I were to be earning like heaps of money at the moment or I were to have success in my job then I would have something to feel good about, but because I am still studying and my masters is not finished at all, at least I have achieved this.

Similarly a number of men suggested that when they were younger, the means by which they achieved any status within their social groups were different and had more to do with image and appearance than they do now. OM provided a particularly clear example illustrating this line of thought:

> OM: Later on in life you don't get your power from being a tough guy or being buff, you get that from being bright and financially influential and powerful because the real world is not like school, you don't intimidate people with, I mean you may do in bars, but you don't intimidate the people around you by how big and strong you look, the biggest strongest guys are the guys who work on the factory floor and I can guarantee you that the boss they work for is probably not intimidated by them, he goes home in his BMW and when they come into his office because they've done something wrong they look like the smallest guys in the world, and they feel like the smallest guys in the world.

In summary, none of the men saw appearance as playing an important role "in the real world" as it was not associated with the achievement of success in life after school. While appearance and image may have been one of the means by which status was achieved during the school years, it was suggested that this was because there are only a limited number of means available at this time. The Ideally Disembodied Self then, saw success as having nothing to do with appearance or the body, and emphasized mental achievement and capacity as the means by which success was achieved.

...versus doing masculinity successfully

One interview revealed something interesting which did not come up in any of the others, and it is felt to be important enough to warrant a small section in this chapter. This study started out with the aim of investigating how, in accounting for their body modification and maintenance practices, men construct themselves as men. During the fifteen interviews conducted, the interviewer spoke generally in terms of appearance, asking the men questions such as "how do you feel about your physical appearance?" Physical appearance was conceptualized in terms of the visual features of the body such as physique, body parts and clothing, things that remain relatively unchanging during the course of a day. However one interviewee has alerted me to the importance of considering the appearance of the body in its *movement* and everyday *activity,* and the role of the appearance of bodily activity in constructing masculinity. This extract from the interview with OM describes the involvement of the body in *doing masculinity successfully*:

> OM: I was just saying that (laughing) sometimes I'll be standing there and I'll be standing in a certain pose, like I'll be slouching slightly to the side on sort of one leg you know, with my other leg relaxing and then I'll feel like maybe my hip is jutted out a little bit womanly and I'll think, 'this isn't a very manly pose' and then I'll sort of straighten myself out and stand on two feet with my legs slightly apart and my arms folded you know, and I'll feel a little bit better about that but it'll be more uncomfortable and I'll really wanna go back to slouching onto the one leg. Sometimes I'll stand with my legs crossed and I'll feel like, it's not even that it's a feminine pose, just that it feels like a

> sort of, it doesn't feel like it's an assertive strong pose it feels like I'm, a weak stance and maybe a slightly feminine stance so it does occur to you every now and then like, 'what I'm doing here is not very manly'.

What is perhaps important is that OM goes on to explain that this performance is not for the benefit of any women who might be observing him but for the benefit of other men, "I want to project a strong image to other men in that way" (OM).

In this quote the performative nature of (hegemonic) masculinity, and indeed gender is illustrated and the importance of the appearance of the moving body in the construction of a masculine self is highlighted. It could not be suggested based on this one finding that this dimension of appearance might be of more concern to men than the other, but it does provide an interesting thread for future research to pick up on.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Within academic inquiry women's bodies constitute an essential part of feminist analysis and it was mentioned in the introduction to this report that the feminine beauty system has been argued to play a central role in women's domination. In contrast to men women are defined primarily in terms of their bodies; Chapkis (1986) and Wolf (1991) both write of how women are judged and attributed status through the maintenance and presentation of their bodies. The identification of women with their bodies (or the objectification of women) involves two persons: one who objectifies and one who is objectified (Bartky, 1990). Bartky (1990), in her examination of the complex nature of feminine vanity (in which it is apparent that women take pleasure in conforming to those ideals of feminine appearance which render them inferior), argues that the objectifier and objectified can be one and the same person, and thus a woman can take towards herself the attitude of a man. In this way, she argues, the self undergoes a doubling: "An Other...who is at the same time myself, is subject for whom my bodily being is object" (Bartky, 1990, p. 39). She suggests that often this Other is often an 'interiorised representative' of the 'fashion-beauty complex'. Described as the vast complex of corporations manufacturing products, providing services and imparting information, images and ideology that produce and regulate femininity, this structure creates an estrangement in a woman's bodily being:

> "On the one hand she *is* it and is scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, she must exist perpetually at a distance from her physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval" (Bartky, 1990, p. 40)[1].

[1] Bartky (1990) argues that this complex seeks to glorify the female body and provide opportunity for narcissistic indulgence while simultaneously depreciating this same body; the female body is constructed as an object in need of transformation. As a result, she concludes, feminine vanity is "an infatuation with an inferiorised body" (Bartky, 1990, p. 40).

In contrast, Western men and masculinities have never been constructed in terms of anything comparable to the 'fashion-beauty complex'. In fact, as Morgan (1993, p. 71) points out, our various ways of understanding (and constructing) men and masculinities make concerted attempts "to exclude considerations of bodies". Related to the ideological equation between men/women and culture/nature is the association of men with rationality and reason (Morgan, 1993), and Davis (2003, p. 127) suggests that where masculinity is directed by the "dictates of rationality ('mind over matter')" the body is irrelevant and to be ignored. Morgan (1993) goes on to argue that representations of the male body often look to deny that body, and he gives the example of the classic men's suit which hides the shape of the body. It is noteworthy that, of the images shown to the interviewees in this study, the advertisement for Brut (depicting a suited male torso) (appendix G) as well as the advertisement for Davidoff's 'Silver Shadow' (depicting only a man's face staring boldly out of the page) (appendix F) received the most favourable responses.

In their study Gill et al. (2005) identified vanity and narcissism as primary constructs used by men in understanding their own and others' experiences of embodiment, and argued that the prohibition of these functioned to regulate and police appropriate masculine behavior in relation to the male body. Consistent with the men in Gill et al.'s (2005) study, the men in this study repeatedly denied that any of their own bodily practices had anything to do with appearance. Accusations of vanity were more readily leveled at other men, and women often served as the foils against which the men minimized the extent of their concern. Despite this many of the men clearly took an interest in their day-to-day appearance and thus I suggest, along with Gill et al. (2005, p. 51), that "rather than being unimportant, the desire to achieve a particular look must simply be presented in way that does not transgress the taboo about appearing vain".

In the previous chapter I expressed a sense of disbelief in response to my interviewees' claims that they were not concerned with their appearance. To be clear it is not that I thought the men were lying or that I believed they were, in reality, vain creatures, but something was missing. It is now apparent that their reliance on the concept of vanity in understanding the manipulation of bodily appearance severely limited the ways in which they made sense of their own and others' appearance

related practices. The interpretive repertoire of vanity is clearly not the only backdrop against which body modification and maintenance can be understood, and yet only one man (DP) read attention to appearance alternatively; as linked to an expression of identity. This finding is consistent with that by Gill et al. (2005) in that the notion of the well-balanced self was not widespread among their 140 participants.

Davis (2003) argues that in addition to being white, heterosexual and middle-class, Western cultures' hegemonic (or normative) masculinity is also disembodied. She argues that it is not "the muscular bodybuilder or the provocative male centerfold" who is at the top of the masculine hierarchy, but "Rational Man" (Davis, 2003, p.126). Indeed, for many of the men in this study the effort required to develop a muscular physique wasn't perceived to be worth the benefits that might ensue from having such a build. The men didn't feel that their appearance was so important that they should put in more effort than they already do because they didn't feel that it would have any impact on their success in life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many of the men distinguished between mental and physical masculinity and valued mental capability and strength of character above physical appearance and ability. Kimmel (1994, p.125) argues that in Western culture, the hegemonic definition of manhood is "a man *in* power, a man *with* power and a man *of* power", and that "we equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control." Brannon (1976 in Kimmel, 1994) suggests that we measure masculinity by power, success, wealth and status and, despite the claim at the bottom of the image in appendix B that "fit is the new rich", the men in this study valued exactly these qualities.

It would be a mistake to construct masculinities as entirely disembodied however, as it is clear that many images of masculinity involve the male body (in action), and many masculinities (such as sporting masculinities) are constructed around male bodily activity. One might suggest then that men are perhaps alienated from the surface of their bodies; Bordo (1999, p.37) writes of how women are encouraged (albeit through the fashion-beauty complex) to relate to the surfaces of their bodies and to take pleasure in the sensuality of skin while this sort of activity is not considered to be 'manly' behaviour for men. Having said this, a local television channel has recently been airing an advertisement by Nivea for their 'Moisturising Body Lotion for Men' although, admittedly, the man in the promotion is not pictured

taking pleasure in smearing himself with the lotion as Bordo (1999) suggests women are commonly shown, but is pictured opening the (flip-top) lid of the container by means of a bottle opener. While it appears that the fashion-beauty complex is expanding to include men, the fact that men report using skincare products for the way that they make their skin *feel* (if we take them at their word) indicates that men's cautious entry into 'the beauty system' may not be the same for men as it is for women. Using a product for the way it makes one *feel* indicates a self less alienated from the experience of the body, as opposed to a self who feels compelled to "cream (her) body with a thousand creams, each designed to act against a different deficiency" (Bartky, 1990, p. 40). This suggestion is consistent with theory – despite the disembodiment that masculinities might be organized around – men's selves have not undergone a doubling; they have not suffered the alienation from their bodies that women can be said to suffer from as a result of their objectification. This harks back to and highlights the importance of the argument advanced in chapter one of this report, in which it is advised that there is no unmediated relationship between media representations of contemporary masculinities and the 'real' men these messages are aimed at.

Gill et al. (2005) embarked on their study with an interest in examining the differences between men but note becoming more fascinated by the similarities occurring between men's accounts. Similarly I began my study with the implicit assumption that men's accounts of their bodily practices would most likely differ from the accounts that women might give of theirs, and was interested to note the similarity between men and women in the disavowal of vanity in relation to their appearance related practices. For example in accounting for their decisions to undergo aesthetic plastic surgery, women have been found to consistently reject interpretations of vanity by claiming that their decision to undergo surgery was not about looking beautiful but about looking "normal" (see Davis, 1995; Dewing, 2004; Gimlin, 2000). As with the men in this study, these women distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate grounds for aesthetic cosmetic surgery. In addition, the women in these studies draw on a discourse of individualism and commonly deny the influence of

external sources on their decision to have cosmetic surgery (claiming that they did it for themselves).[2]

In their discussion, Gill et al. (2005) suggest that where the lines between vanity and legitimate concern are drawn is less important than the fact that men they interviewed felt that they can and should be drawn. They argue that this relates to the 'rampant individualism' saturating their interviewee's accounts, and suggest that the notion of vanity functions as a "kind of catch-all category" for explaining those things that are inconsistent with an individualistic perspective (Gill et al., 2005, p. 53). The authors conclude that men have few resources other than a discourse of individualism available to them in making sense of their bodily practices. The similarity between men's and women's accounts in this regard makes sense in that the individual is a central feature of contemporary Western culture. The rejection of vanity seems to be one strategy used by subjects in managing the ideological dilemma posed by Western culture where we are advised not to 'judge a book by it's cover' and appearances are devalued as 'superficial', while at the same time we are convinced of the benefits (and importance) of obtaining and maintaining an attractive appearance. With this emphasis on individuality and in a culture which has been described as one in which the body is treated as a vehicle for self-expression (e.g. Davis, 1995; Featherstone, 1982; Finkelstein, 1991), men's (and women's) apparent reliance on the concept of vanity as opposed to identity in making sense of appearance sits quite strangely.

The fact that both men and women have been found to understand their own and others' bodily practices in terms of individualism and vanity must cause one to consider the role of rejecting vanity in policing and regulating normative *masculinity*. I do not intend to deny gender differences in "bodily experience, body practices and cultural discourses on beauty and body alteration" (Davis, 2003, p. 118), but merely to say that it is important to pay attention not only to the differences between the accounts of men and women but also to the similarities occurring between these accounts. In his critique of the concept of masculinity (and masculinities), Hearn (1996) argues that the diverse and varying nature of 'masculinity' in relation to the

[2] An interesting study would be one investigating the ways in which women account for their more routine, everyday appearance related practices.

multiple selves that develop during an individuals' life-course suggest that masculinity may not be the most appropriate concept with which to analyze particular social situations and events. Similarly I suggest that the observed similarity between men's and women's accounts of their appearance related practices should perhaps cause us to consider the suitability of approaching data with the concept of masculinity/masculinities in mind, and using it as a reference point against which to evaluate identities and behaviors (Hearn, 1996).

One finding from this study that can be taken to provide some evidence for the appropriateness of the concept of masculinity/masculinities in the analysis of social behavior is the fact that many of the men interviewed attributed various appearance related behaviors to women: interest in appearance, cosmetic surgery and the consumption of appearance related products were more readily associated with women than with men. Dull & West (1991) suggest that sex categories provide a popular resource for characterizing social action, and in this study the men themselves used the categories of 'men' and 'women' in accounting for appearance related practices and in their attempts to make sense of the concept of masculinity; men "[aren't] supposed to care that much about [their] appearance" (OM) and women, well, "they just go for cosmetic surgery" (MD). Putting effort into appearance, undergoing cosmetic surgery and buying cosmetic products (including those marketed to men) were all treated as things that women do. The fact that women do these things was taken for granted and required no justification, whereas the men went to great lengths to justify their own appearance related actions in terms of function and practicality. It would seem that a concern with appearance remains, for these men at least, an "accomplishment of gender" (Dull & West, 1991, p. 64).

In contrast to the men in Gill et al.'s (2005, p. 37) study, the men in this study did not invest their appearance with much importance and the surfaces of their bodies were not charged with "'identity functions'". While the men in Gill et al.'s (2005, p. 44) study justified divergent and opposing product and body modification choices (e.g. buying brand labels, getting tattoos and muscle building) in terms of "being

different"[3] , the majority of men in this study did not speak of their bodily practices in terms of their expressive functions; they did not interpret such practices to say anything about themselves. Instead the men in this study understood the importance of appearance primarily within the context of heterosexual relationships and in terms of attracting a partner. Indeed 'The Heterosexual Self' was a regular and dominant subject position, asserted most vigorously in response to the images of idealized and eroticized male bodies shown to the men during the course of their interviews. The men expressed discomfort in viewing objectified male bodies and refused to engage in the sexualized evaluation of these bodies. Herek (1987) suggests that homophobia is inherent in Western cultures' construction of (hegemonic) heterosexual male identity, and that heterosexual men reaffirm their male identity by attacking homosexual men. While many of the men explicitly denied that they were "homophobic", readings of homosexuality were strongly defended against and they were all clearly invested in their positions as heterosexual men. Despite the obvious value attached to heterosexuality by these men, a number of them expressed acceptance of homosexuality on the basis that they were comfortable enough with their sexuality not to be threatened by other men's sexual choices. It was also suggested (by interviewees) that being comfortable with ones' sexuality enables one to engage in behaviors not traditionally associated with men and appropriate male behavior. It has already been mentioned that this discourse around sexuality appears progressive in that it suggests the potential for men to engage in a wider repertoire of behaviors including those previously sanctioned for women, and for experiencing the pleasures associated with these. As Bordo (1999, p. 217) points out "the business of beauty is not without its pleasures", and she suggests that a beauty routine can be seen to offer the chance of daily transformation and renewal. Two men interviewed in this study (AM and TM in 'The Unselfconscious Self') acknowledged this aspect to their morning skin care routines.

It has already been said that the seemingly progressive and liberal discourse around being comfortable with ones' sexuality buys back into the dominant discourse of

[3] According to Gill et al. (2005, p. 44) for example, some men claimed to buy brand label clothing to "be a bit different" while others used the same line of argument to explain why they *didn't* buy brand label clothing.

traditional masculinity by retaining heterosexuality as the standard against which other men are measured. Similarly, Herek (1987) argues that the adoption of more flexible behavior patterns amongst men and the resultant change that is presumed to have occurred in Western cultures' conception of masculinity are counterbalanced by the strengthening of the heterosexual component belonging to traditional masculinity. Thus, he argues, "the man who is 'secure' in his masculinity (heterosexuality) may be gentle and may eat quiche" (Herek, 1987, p. 76). It is also appropriate to heed Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner's (1994, p. 214) warning (which echoes the argument made by Chapman (1988) in chapter one of this report) that contemporary ideas around masculinity incorporating "highly celebrated public displays of sensitivity can be read as a desire to project an image of egalitarianism within a context where he actually enjoys considerable power and privilege over women and other men". They argue that, when analyzed within a structure of power, the seemingly progressive gender displays of contemporary men are perhaps best seen as strategies to reconstruct hegemonic masculinity by projecting domination and misogyny onto subordinate groups of men.

What is interesting and what has implications for future research around men and body image is the finding that appearance was reported to have mattered more to the men during their school years. In this context, where the majority of young men are not able to demonstrate those characteristics associated with those aspects of hegemonic masculinity previously mentioned as being valued (financial success, for example), physical appearance and the benefits that ensue from having and maintaining a 'good' appearance (such as a number of friends and/or admirers for example) quite conceivably plays a larger role in an individuals' status.

The men in this study often had considerable trouble explaining what masculinity meant to them, and this is consistent with research by Drummond (2005a). In interviews with both homo- and heterosexual men, Drummond (2005a) found that homosexual men could articulate meanings of masculinity in a more fluid and reflective manner than heterosexual men, who defined masculinity primarily by what it was not (that is, not feminine in any way). The men in this study were all white, middle-class and heterosexual, and thus of that group whose 'masculinity' can be described as hegemonic. Miller (1976 in Herek, 1987) points out that members of

dominant groups typically think of themselves as "normal" people, and Drummond (2005a) suggests that heterosexual men are given little cause to reflect upon their sexuality and masculinity due to the fact that heterosexuality, as the 'norm', escapes analysis and interpretation. This same argument can be advanced for the (ideally) disembodied selves presented by the men in their interviews. Being healthy and able-bodied, unencumbered by ones' physicality and thus part of the norm, gives one little cause for considering ones embodied experience[4]. In fact, if one refers back to Drummond's (2005b) study amongst homosexual men (see page 8 of this report), being heterosexual can be seen to give one little cause for reflecting on ones bodily performance of masculinity. Only one man in this study (OM) reflected spontaneously on the experience of physically performing masculinity in everyday life. OM's description of his awareness of his stance is consistent with the theory of masculinity as homosocial enactment:

> "Other men: We are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance" (Kimmel, 1994, p. 128).

The bodily performance of masculinity by men is an interesting aspect of men's embodied experience and I would have liked to have had more men reflecting on this in their interviews. In an attempt to get a few of the other men to do this, and based on the example given by OM's, I asked them to think about whether there were or ever had been any occasions in which they would suddenly consider whether what they were doing might look feminine to observers. This was a clumsy question which received blank stares in response, and the provision of an example (also based on OM's experience) of what I meant didn't help. None of the remaining fourteen men could reflect on the bodily performance of masculinity. This is perhaps an avenue of research better suited to other methods of investigation (participant observation, for example).

[4] This is in addition to Morgan's (1993) argument that one feature inherent in a system of patriarchal domination is the fact that men are not required to reflect upon their positions as men or to consider themselves as gendered and embodied subjects.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, men in the study by Hatoum & Belle (2004) suggested the importance of considering issues around penis size in studies on male body image. The penis, considered by Western culture to be the "absolute insignia of maleness" (Bordo, 1999, p. 23), is obviously of great importance in considering the appearance of the male body; male anxiety around penis size is well-known and associated with a pattern of behavior (in which men (overtly or covertly) 'measure up' against other men) that has come to be called "locker room syndrome". Bordo (1999) devotes a large proportion of her recent analysis of cultural representations of the male body to the penis, and compares men's insecurities about penis size to women's insecurities about their body size. She directs the reader to a study conducted by Lee (1996) in which it was found that the men in the sample tended to *underestimate* their penis size regardless of their actual measurements – this in mirror image to the large body of work in which women are found to *overestimate* their body size[5].

The penis, as an organ, is often kept well out of public sight in contrast to the proliferation of phallocentric representations of men within contemporary popular culture (Bordo, 1999; Edwards, 1997; Morgan, 1993). Indeed the penis, as a topic of conversation, was kept out of my interviews with most of the fifteen men – not one man volunteered information regarding its role in their feelings around bodily appearance and I was often too shy to ask. I did broach the issue with seven interviewees mainly by way of asking their thoughts around the surgical practice of penis augmentation. Each of these men responded by painting (other) men who undergo or desire to have such surgery as vain ("that's just ego", MD) and as wanting to impress women and other men. None spoke personally about their own penises, and I was happy not to push the issue. Two of these seven men raised the debate regarding the relation between penis size and pleasure during sex, and sought my opinion on what "women think"! My intense discomfort at being faced with this question prevented me from exploring this topic further and in these two particular cases it was I who shut down this avenue of conversation. It is important to note that

[5] Interestingly (and on the basis of this finding) Bordo (1999, p. 34-35) suggests that it is this "most male of bodily sites" that "holds the most promise for a deeper identification between men and women".

the appearance of the penis should not only be considered in terms of size; Morgan (1993, p. 75) denies, as a boy, ever having suffered anxiety around the size of his "member" but candidly admits that the anxiety he did feel had to do with erections and the potential visibility of these in public situations. It is clear that the absence of the penis in work exploring the embodiment of men renders it incomplete, thus the absence of talk around the penis within my interviews is perhaps the largest limitation of this study.

In terms of other limitations to this study, the fact that the number of participants was quite small (n=15) is not felt to affect the generalisability of the data because, as Wetherell & Edley (1999) argue, people's talk reflects broad (or global) patterns of collective sense-making and understanding. It is felt that a larger sample size may have produced a larger variety of subject positions though, and perhaps more could have been said about 'The Well-Balanced Self' had there been more men taking up this position. Done again, I believe that I would consider being more vigorous in my own contribution to the conversations taking place in the context of the interviews, as I feel that urging people to account for their positions might better reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies hidden in their discourse. I also feel that it might have been better to remove product and company names from the advertisements shown to the men. While the adverts elicited an interesting subject position ('The Non-Consumer'), it would have been interesting to see how the men responded to images of masculinity and the male body as images and not as advertisements.

With regards to the analysis performed in this study, it is felt that the concepts of interpretive repertoires, subject positions and ideological dilemmas provided a useful framework for interpreting the broad patterns that occurred in the interviewees talk. Wetherell (1998) argues for the importance of accountability in fuelling the take-up of positions in talk, and it was in attempting to account for their appearance and body related practices that the men in this study positioned themselves as men. The concept of interpretive repertoires provided a concrete way in which to identify social norms regulating masculinities in relation to appearance related practices and the male body, while the concept of subject positioning provided a practical way to investigate the impact of these norms on 'real' men as they positioned themselves in relation to shared (or global) patterns of sense-making.

To conclude, the men in this study dis-identified with models of traditional masculinity and positioned themselves as 'ordinary', 'regular' and 'conventional' guys in relation to these models. In addition to being 'ordinary' however, many of the men emphasized their individuality and described themselves as 'different' to other men with regards to their personal characteristics; many felt that it was admirable to have certain qualities traditionally associated with femininity and with women. Despite devaluing models of macho masculinity, the men positioned themselves in very close alignment with the characteristics of Western hegemonic masculinity. Against claims that men's interest in their appearance is increasing, a concern with appearance, cosmetic surgery and consumerism for the men in this study remain gendered activities. My interviewees subscribed to what can be described as traditional ideals of (hegemonic) masculine success such as wealth, status and independence. As far as the men were concerned, the body had little to do with the acquisition of these and thus was not felt to be something worthy of much consideration.

While it is clear that men are engaging in a wider repertoire of behaviors which includes those previously sanctioned for women, I argue in line with Davis (2003, p. 118) that men are unlikely to "[fall] into the same cultural traps that have been laid for women" with regards to their bodies and beauty. It has been argued that experimental research investigating men's body image is incomplete and that there is no direct relationship between models of masculinity promoted within popular culture and 'real' men. It is thus rash to proclaim the development of a 'unisexual beauty myth' on the basis of 'problematic' body image and the promotion of consumer masculinities. While representations of masculinities may seem to encourage men to take towards themselves the position of 'objectifier', it can be argued that ideals of hegemonic (and successful) masculinities in Western culture are disembodied; men are not defined through their bodies to the extent that women are and have various other, more valued means of achieving success in life and of enacting (successful) masculinities. This is not to disregard the suffering that some boys and men clearly do experience in relation to the appearance of their bodies but, as Connell (1995; 2005) suggests, dominant masculinities are always found in relation to other masculinities and Osgerby (2003) contends that it is within this hierarchy that a male personality constructed around narcissism and commodity consumption has a long

history. Rather I would like to suggest that the narcissistic and consuming male (based on archetypes such as the 'metrosexual') constitutes a niche market and that it is inappropriate to consider men, in general, as the new victims of the beauty myth.

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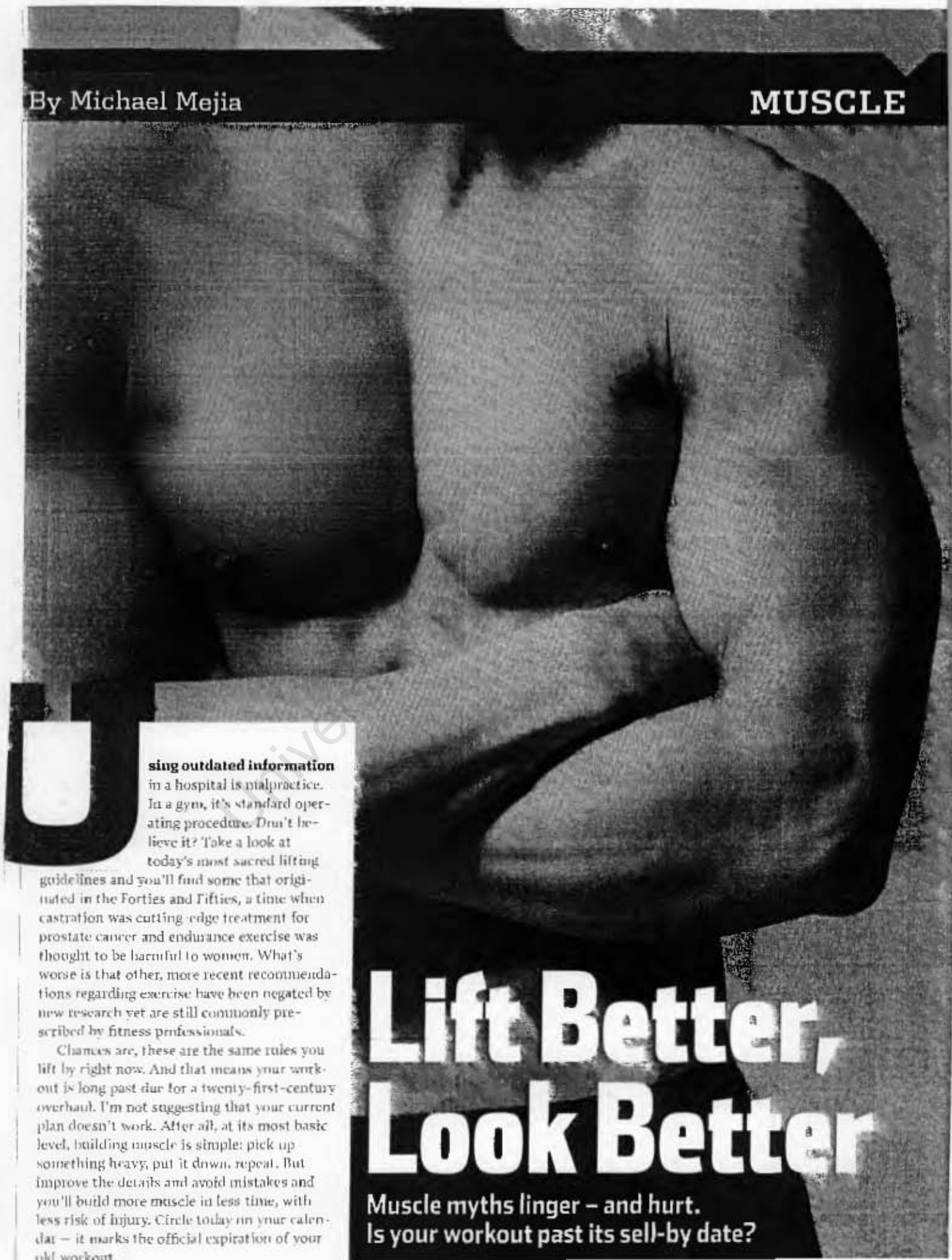
APPENDIX

By Michael Mejia

MUSCLE



Lift Better, Look Better

Muscle myths linger – and hurt. Is your workout past its sell-by date?

Using outdated information in a hospital is malpractice. In a gym, it's standard operating procedure. Don't believe it? Take a look at today's most sacred lifting guidelines and you'll find some that originated in the Forties and Fifties, a time when castration was cutting-edge treatment for prostate cancer and endurance exercise was thought to be harmful to women. What's worse is that other, more recent recommendations regarding exercise have been negated by new research yet are still commonly prescribed by fitness professionals.

Chances are, these are the same rules you lift by right now. And that means your workout is long past due for a twenty-first-century overhaul. I'm not suggesting that your current plan doesn't work. After all, at its most basic level, building muscle is simple: pick up something heavy, put it down, repeat. But improve the details and avoid mistakes and you'll build more muscle in less time, with less risk of injury. Circle today on your calendar – it marks the official expiration of your old workout.

YOUR BODY

Relax. We've got your body basics covered. A year's worth of new workouts, weekend breaks, health tips and all the fast fixes you'll need. Consider this your monthly instalment to a happy, healthier you.

BODYWORK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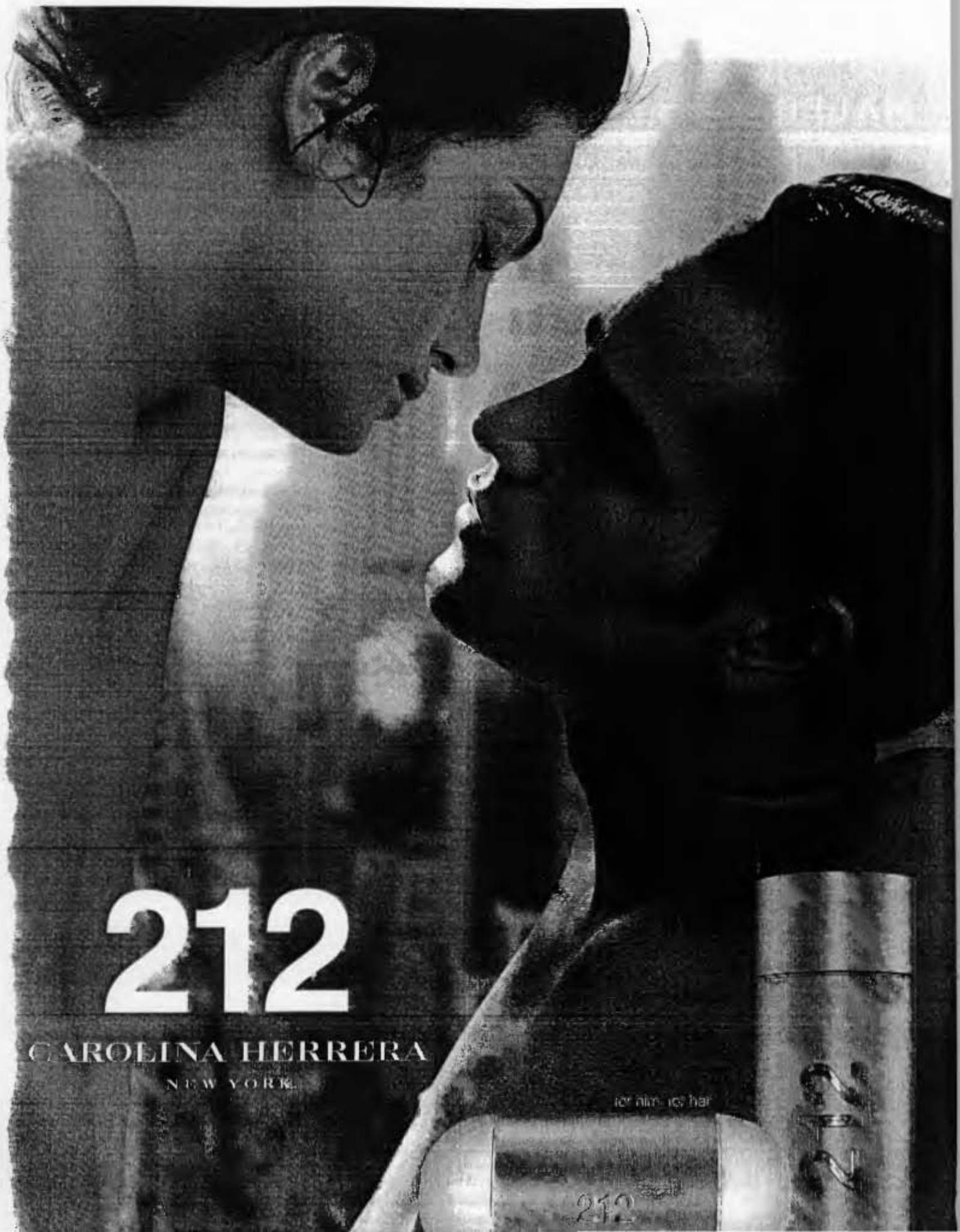
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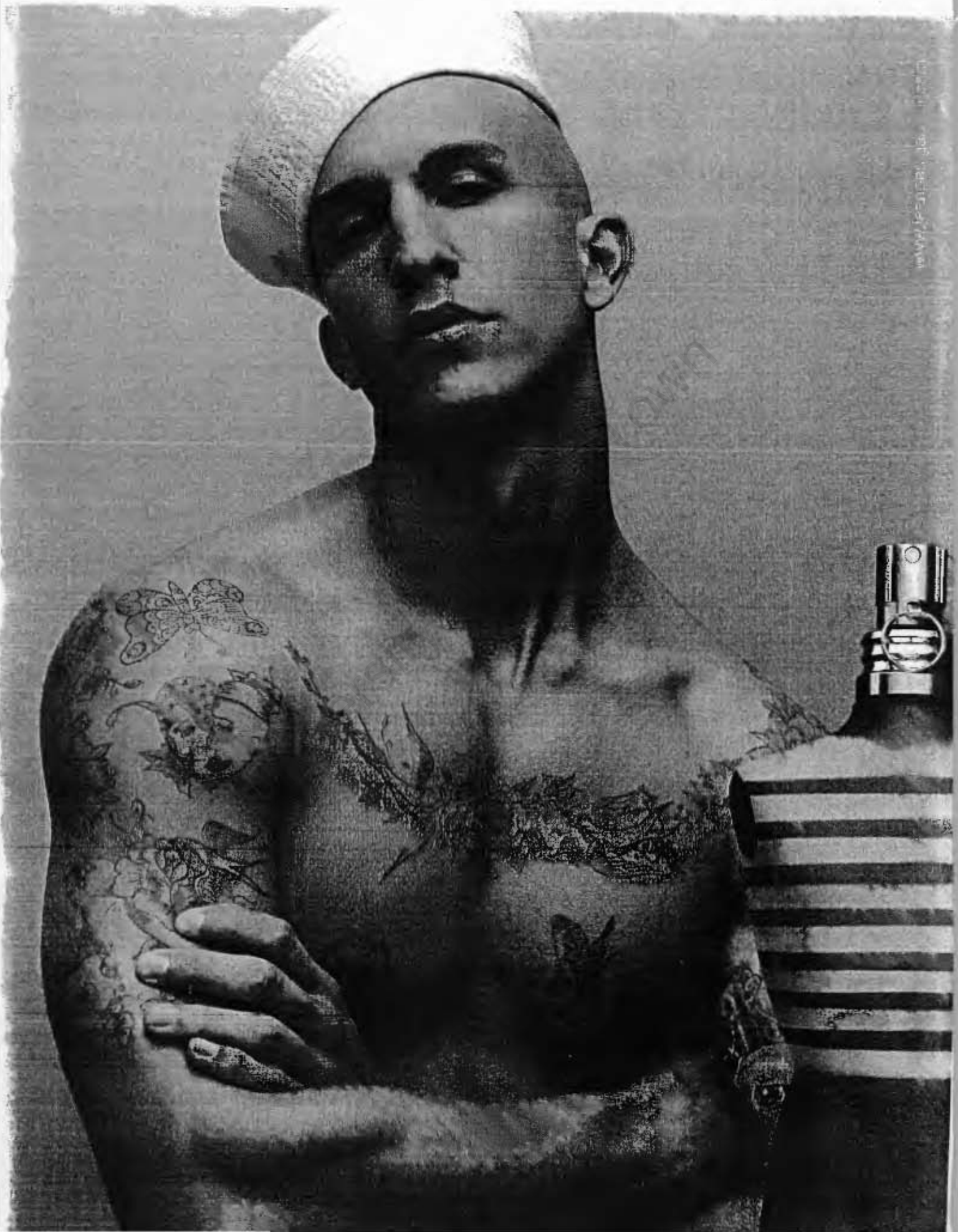

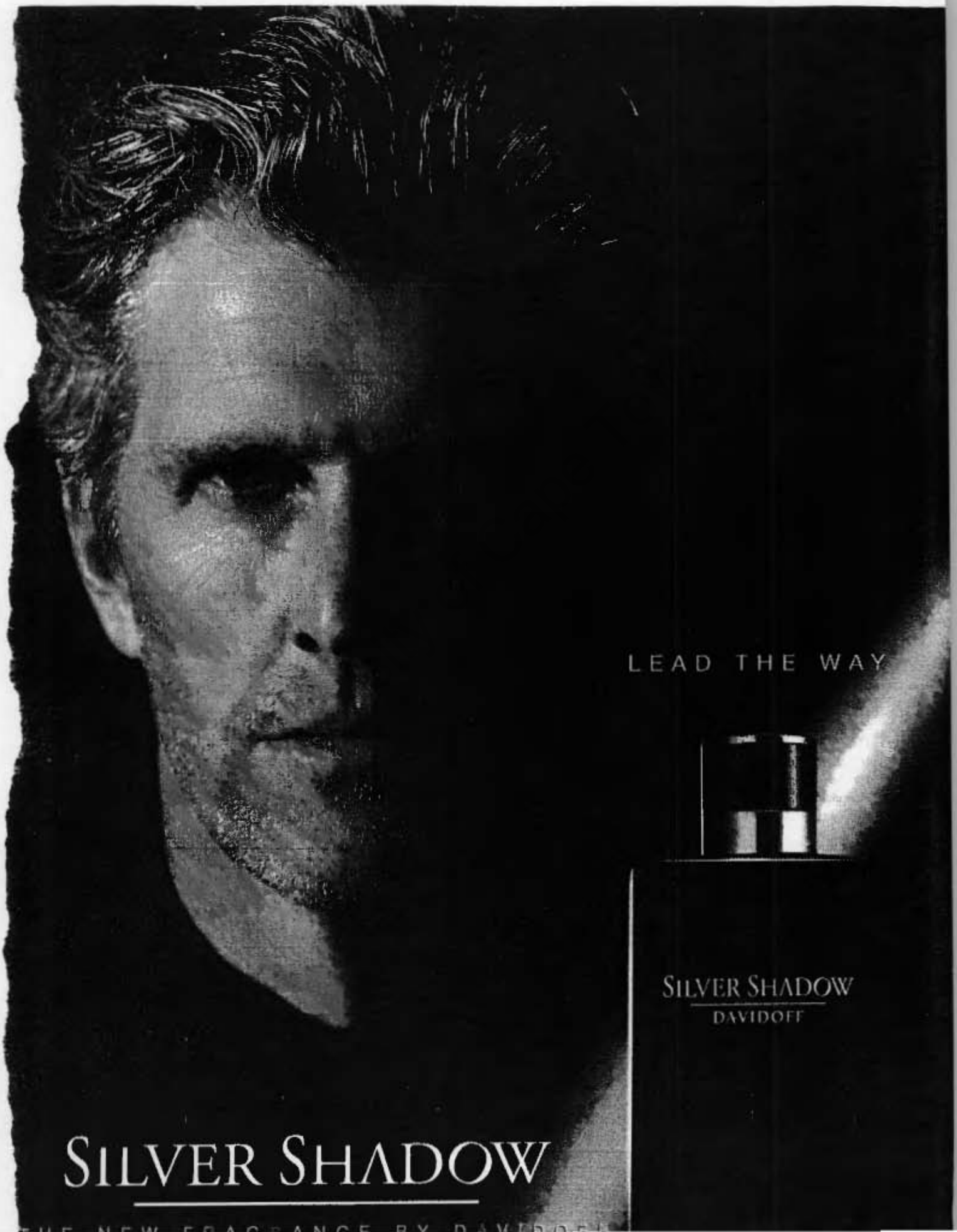
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